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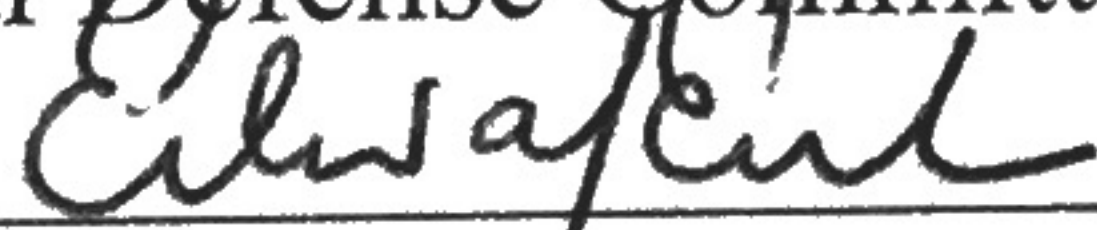
**It only makes Sense:
Aligning Personnel Policies & Procedures
Across the U.S. Armed Forces**

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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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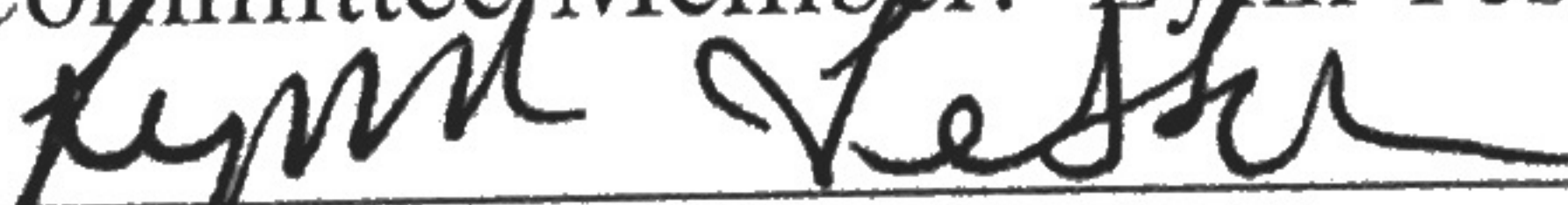
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Executive Summary

Title: It only makes Sense: Aligning Personnel Policies & Procedures Across the U.S. Armed Forces

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Thesis: Consolidating select personnel policies and procedures across the armed forces would create efficiencies for the United States Department of Defense.

Discussion: This paper discusses the extent the United States DoD could gain efficiencies by consolidating common personnel policies, procedures, and information systems across the services. It provides a historical review of the Canadian military, which now operates as a fully unified force structure. In addition, there is a historical review of limited unification efforts of the United States armed forces, which arose following the conclusion of World War II. The main areas of focus were promotions, evaluations, uniforms, leave and liberty, and personnel records, which are common personnel areas across the armed forces.

Conclusion: Consolidating personnel policies and procedures the armed forces would realize a number of efficiencies, to include reduced man hours and manpower spent updating policies and procedures when the Department of Defense makes changes, and the ability to improve the joint personnel system while reducing the amount of staff needed to support it.

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Preface

After spending three years in the joint community, two-thirds of which was focused on personnel policies and procedures as the Deputy Chief of Senior Leader Management, and as the Manpower and Personnel Representative for the Combatant Commander's staff and Manpower and Personnel Directorate, I realized that there were as many systems to achieve the same end-state as there were services. Each time an evaluation or promotion cycle came around, the service instructions and regulations were pulled off the shelf, thoroughly researched, and briefed to senior officers. A single process might require several sets of regulations to be reviewed. These processes were common across the armed forces, but each service conducted them in a different manner, despite the same overarching law, guidance, and policy. I would like to thank Edward J. Erickson, PhD for his mentorship and guidance throughout this process.

Introduction

The United States armed forces, consisting of the United States Army (USA), United States Navy (USN), United States Marine Corps (USMC), United States Air Force (USAF), and United States Coast Guard, each have unique histories and origins, starting in 1775 and leading up to their organization under the Department of Defense (DoD) in 1949. The individual histories of the forces resulted in the distinctive development and organization of each entity. Over the course of the last century, particularly upon the conclusion of World War II, significant alignment (policies regarding the arrangement of the forces in relation to one another¹) and unification (making a coherent whole² from separate components) of the armed forces has occurred within the United States. While the DoD has made progress, its efforts need to focus on further alignment to gain efficiencies. The continuous decline of the defense budget in a fiscally constrained environment is a driving factor for the need to identify areas to gain efficiencies. One example of a common area throughout the services is personnel. To what extent could the United States DoD gain efficiencies by consolidating personnel policies, procedures, and information systems across the services? This paper will provide a historical review of foreign militaries with unified force structures, and areas of unification already existing across the United States DoD in addition to a review of current personnel policies and procedures and information systems that may benefit from unification in these areas.

The personnel structure across the armed forces is similar. Each follows the same hierarchical structure and command relationships with an officer and enlisted force. While the same laws and mandates drive personnel policies, each service executes them differently. Consolidating select personnel policies and procedures across the armed forces would create efficiencies for the United States Department of Defense.

Methodology

Because of the United States Coast Guard's unique relationship with the Department of Homeland Security, it will not be considered for the purpose of this paper. This does not indicate, however, that the U.S. Coast Guard would not or could not benefit from synchronization with the other armed forces. Additionally, this paper will seek only to address the active duty components, as the relationship between the reserve components, the guard, and active duty differ from service to service. In the future, potential efficiencies might transcend from the active duty to the reserve and guard components. For example, this would be considered within the USAF automatically as part of an initiative outlined in the National Commission on the Structure of the Air Force to consolidate the active duty component, reserve component, and Air National Guard instructions and processes where applicable.³ While the content of this paper will only specifically address the commissioned officer corps, grades of O-1 through O-6, and enlisted corps of each service, the basis of the thesis extends to the warrant officer corps (which is not common throughout all of the Armed Forces) and to general and flag officers (O-7 through O-10).

Historical Alignment Efforts

United States

The World War II experience drastically influenced the future of the U.S. military as the services recognized the significance of unity of effort achieved through unified command.⁴ This realization led to the National Security Act of 1947, which focused on reorganization to better align the Armed Forces. This act is most well known for creating the office of the Secretary of Defense and establishing the USAF as a separate service, and ultimately led to the formation of the Department of Defense in 1949.^{5,6} It was also responsible for creating the Unified Combatant

Commands, which have a “broad continuing mission under a single commander and composed of significant assigned components of two or more Military Departments.”⁷ The Combatant Commands were designed to provide the unity of effort through unity of command that was lacking in WWII. U.S. military operations were now planned under a single commander with access to all of the capabilities of the joint forces.

Alignment and unification efforts continued with the Goldwater–Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, which took further steps to bring the military services under the DoD together in a more cohesive manner. Specifically, the act granted the Joint Chiefs of Staff more power and streamlined the chain of command to give the Unified Combatant Commanders a direct line to the Secretary of Defense. The act also focused on joint personnel officer management and outlined the following specific goals for officers in joint duty assignments:

- 1) “Select more talented (quality) officers for joint duty assignments”
- 2) “Increase the joint experience level of officers in joint assignments”
- 3) “Provide appropriate education for joint officers”⁸

Goldwater-Nichols identified several policy initiatives to achieve these goals, however, they were directive vice instructive in nature and failed to address the implementation of jointly aligned policies or procedures, leaving service-specific mechanisms in place.

Overall, the unification efforts of the U.S. armed forces have been implemented broadly, focusing on improving joint operations. Despite the intent of the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, no efforts have been made to complete an alignment of administrative or support structures, such as personnel policies and procedures, which would assist in meeting the joint personnel officer management goals outlined in the act.

Canada

Like the U.S. armed forces, the Canadian military also has a history of unification efforts, however, they went far beyond the U.S., eventually realizing full alignment along with complete unification. On 1 February 1968, the three separate services of the Canadian military unified to become the Canadian Armed Forces.⁹ The impetus for this reorganization stemmed from government consensus that the result of unification and alignment would be substantial fiscal savings, which was necessary based on limited resources due to a fixed defense budget. Additionally, the Canadian government sought unification to produce a more efficient military better able to meet global demands.¹⁰

The unification of the Canadian military took part in three separate phases. The first phase implemented a single Chief of Defense Staff that reported to the Minister of National Defense on all military matters.¹¹ The second phase functionally aligned the Field Command structure, reducing the number of commands by 45 percent. The third and final phase was the actual unification and alignment of the three services into the Canadian Armed Forces.¹² Overall, there was wide support during the unification period in Canadian history; however, there was great concern regarding the amount of changes that occurred on such a tight a timeline. From the time the Minister of National Defence, Paul Hellyer, introduced a white paper on the subject to the achievement of complete unification was just under four years.¹³

Similar to the U.S., prior to unification each of the Canadian military services maintained distinctly separate support facilities and organizations, despite their common functions.¹⁴ Before the full unification, the Canadian government made efforts to align and standardize policies across the services. These early efforts largely failed due to a poorly organized tri-service committee and disagreements between the services on how to implement the integrated

policies.¹⁵ The committee included the Chiefs of the Naval, General, and Air Staff and with the senior service chief acting as the head.¹⁶ Each of the chiefs brought their own set of service-related interests into the committee. Eventually, an independent Chairman was appointed, however, he had no executive authority or veto power, and therefore was unable to overrule the service chiefs.¹⁷ The chiefs also had direct access to the Minister of Defense and would often promote their agendas to him behind each other's backs.¹⁸ Ultimately, complete unification and alignment was implemented despite the conflicting interests and lack of progress in the initial phases.

Though the unification was finalized, the effect Hellyer was seeking from restructuring the forces was largely unsuccessful. The struggles seen in the tri-service committee were never fully resolved, and service loyalty remained as each continued to plan and operate independently of the other.¹⁹ During the 1970s and 1980s a lack of leadership in both the political and military domains resulted in little policy direction.²⁰ Further, service-aligned commitments to the United Nations fueled a continuation of service-specific planning.²¹ Substantial budget cuts in the 1990s forced the services to approach a “bottom-up service-oriented approach” just to maintain minimal capabilities.²²

Despite the operational struggles, some areas of the unification were successful. The integration of the services reduced operating costs and saw substantial savings in support and administration processes. Additionally, the Canadian Armed Forces were able to eliminate duplicate and triplicate facilities and services.²³ These efficiencies also had an overall impact reducing manpower, allowing a strength reduction, which was beneficial for the reduced budget.²⁴

Lessons Learned from Historical Alignment

The U.S. has achieved improved unity of effort through the creation of the Unified Combatant Commands, allowing operational plans to be developed across the joint force. To meet this objective, the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 identified goals to improve joint knowledge for officers serving in these positions. However, the U.S. stopped short of aligning policies and procedures across the services that would support these goals.

The unification of the Canadian Armed Forces demonstrated that unification efforts will inevitably face challenges, and the process by which unification is done should be thoroughly evaluated. In the Canadian example, the unification had limited success, mostly in the administrative and support areas, while the operational aspect left room for significant improvement. Hellyer's forward-leaning approach and compressed timeline to complete the unification did not allow for sufficient planning to ensure success.

Based on the Canadian example, the argument can be made that unification of other armed forces would not be successful. Instead, the lessons learned should be carried forward to inform unification processes. First, certain areas, particularly administrative and support services have a large opportunity for success, as they eliminate redundancy across the separate branches. Second, an independent committee should be established to determine the method of alignment (i.e., develop the overarching policy) with service representatives as advisors/voting members, though none with full authority.

Terms and Definitions

The personnel structure is a major common component of the U.S. armed forces, however, there is a lack of consistency in policies and procedures. The term *personnel* is defined as “individuals required in either a military or civilian capacity to accomplish the assigned

mission.” For the purposes of this paper, the “assigned mission” is the overall role of the DoD for the United States and the focus will be on commissioned officer, warrant officer, and enlisted military personnel. *Policy* is a “statement of important, high-level direction that guides decisions and actions. Policy translates the ideas, goals, or principles contained in the mission, vision, and strategic plan into actionable directives.” *Procedures* are the “standard, detailed steps that prescribe how to perform specific tasks.”²⁵ An *Information System* is “integrated set of components for collecting, storing, and processing data and for delivering information, knowledge, and digital products.”²⁶

United States Armed Forces Personnel Policies and Procedures

The separate branches of the armed forces manage their personnel and personnel structures in similar manners. This is due, in part, to the obligation to adhere to United States Code (U.S.C.) Title 10, DoD Directives and Instructions, and policy from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (typically outlined in Joint Publications). Each service has an officer corps and an enlisted corps designed to serve the same basic roles (i.e., the officer corps performs management duties, the enlisted corps provides technical expertise). Despite the same top-level laws and policies, the services delineate additional and distinct personnel policies and procedures, which creates extra workload in both the creation and execution of these policies and procedures without an equivalent return on investment.

Since the creation of the Combatant Commands the services have fought jointly. However, differing service-specific policies create confusion and a steeper learning curve in the joint environment. With emphasis on joint cooperation and improved joint officer proficiency, it is important for a common understanding of personnel records, including performance reports, individual duty information, and promotion processes to make hiring decisions and manage

individual careers effectively. Aligning other service personnel policies, such as those regarding uniforms and entitlements, will realize additional efficiencies across the armed forces.

Promotions

Officers

Each service is obligated to the same promotion law under Title 10 United States Code. For commissioned officers, DoD Instructions (DoDI) 1320.13, Commissioned Officer Promotion Reports and 1320.14, Commissioned Officer Promotion Program Procedures, have delineated additional policy. Based on the law and common instruction, an inherent analogous system exists for commissioned officers. For example, all services are obligated to conduct promotion boards, during which a panel of senior officials review individual records to determine which officers will get promoted.²⁷ However, differing policies and procedures have been set in place by each service, although some variances are necessary to maintain the correct force structure. For instance, each secretary of the individual military departments is able to determine the appropriate timing of promotions (i.e., an individual's time in service or time in grade) to achieve the correct force ratio within their respective service.²⁸ Therefore, not all commissioned officers will promote at the same pace.

While some differences are clearly necessary, other variances are only procedural in nature and based on solely on service preference. This is illustrated by the USAF commissioned officer promotion system. The USAF conducts a records review performed by a board as required by law, but in addition another form, known as an Air Force Form 709, Promotion Recommendation Form (PRF), is required.²⁹ This USAF's PRF is a consolidation by the Senior Rater (the evaluator designated to complete the PRF) of the individual record and, as indicated in the name, provides a promotion recommendation to the promotion board.³⁰

While the addition of a single form may seem minor, the PRF makes the USAF officer promotion system redundant and arduous. The form provides little additional information to the promotion board as the data is extracted from the same record the board is already obligated to review. Eliminating the PRF would save time spent on policy, drafting and reviewing the forms, and determining the promotion recommendations. The man-hours saved would be markedly significant to the USAF without a noticeable impact to officer quality. It is arguable that the removal of the PRF may affect individual selections during a promotion board by removing the Senior Rater's recommendation. This may indeed occur, however, any impact would be on an individual level and transparent to the USAF writ large. Because the promotion board has access to the entire personnel record, the only data point missing would be the senior rater's personal recommendation, which is based on the same record the promotion board reviews. Individuals potentially impacted would be only those who were straddling the fence between selection and non-selection. Given that the rate of return diminishes as the median is approached, the difference in the overall quality of individuals would be nominal.

Changes to the commissioned officer promotion system to fully align policies and procedures would ensure both U.S. law and DoD policy are applied appropriately and equally across the services. Alignment of policies and procedures should still allow the service secretaries the latitude to adjust timing to meet force ratio requirements while eliminating redundancies, such as the USAF's PRF. Alignment would also reduce the amount of time spent drafting separate sets of instructions, regulations, and procedures, and reduce the number of information systems needed to conduct service-specific processes.

Enlisted

Congress determines the enlisted promotion ratios annually in the National Defense Authorization Act.³¹ While there is no statutory limit for E-4 and below, Congress outlines the total end-strength and the percentage of the force that can serve in grades E-5 and above.³² The USMC limits the percentage of Marines in the grades of E-4 and below, despite the lack of external restraints.³³ Additionally, the USMC holds competitive promotions for E-4 while the other services essentially conduct automatic promotions through E-4 once time-in-grade and time-in-service requirements have been met.³⁴ There are several unique nuances within the Army process. For example, the USA uses a decentralized (unit level) promotion process for E-2 through E-4, semi-centralized promotions for E-5 and E-6, and centralized promotion boards for E-7 and above.³⁵ The USAF is unique in an accelerated promotion program from E-1 to E-3 for enlistees who sign a 6-year contract.³⁶ Additionally, it uses a weighted points promotion system vice a promotion board for E-5 through E-7 promotions.³⁷ The USAF also does not consider specific career fields when determining promotion ratios, however, it does allot an additional percentage of promotions to career fields considered critically manned.³⁸ Additionally, the USAF is the only service that does not consider an individual to be a non-commissioned officer (NCO) until E-5, while E-4s are considered non-commissioned officers for the other services. This creates a disparity between the expected level of responsibility for the same pay as the other services.

The wide variety of processes within the U.S. armed forces enlisted promotions generates a large amount of service-specific time and financial investment without significant variation in return. Despite the individual service processes, the end result is the same. The Airmen, Sailors, Soldiers, and Marines still advance through the ranks in a similar manner. The same output

could be achieved while reducing the amount of input required by aligning the service processes for enlisted promotions. Similar to the officer promotions, there should still be an allowance for some variances for the services to achieve the correct force ratio. Steps should be taken to align the NCO ranks across the services. This is particularly important as the U.S. continues to operate in the joint environment by allowing joint commanders to assign equivalent levels of responsibility to appropriate ranks. Since the majority of the services start NCO ranks at E-4, the USAF should adapt by starting their NCO corps at E-4 as well. In doing so, it would also be prudent to eliminate the USAF's accelerate promotion for 6-year enlistees. Removing the accelerated process would allow the time need to cultivate an NCO. Additionally, with the current environment of volunteerism and force shaping, there is not a need to further incentivize first-term enlistees.

Evaluations

Each service requires performance evaluations, typically completed on an annual basis. The USN and USAF (enlisted) complete evaluations in batches, meaning each rank is due at the same time every year.^{39,40} For example, all USN O-5s are due every April.⁴¹ The USA, USMC, and USAF (commissioned officer) typically complete reports one year from when the last report closed.^{42,43,44} Each service has unique rules on what happens with reports when there is a change in supervision. For example, the USAF requires a new report if there has been at least 120 days of supervision under the current rater (first officer in the chain to sign the evaluation).⁴⁵ The USN allows 90-day extensions on annual reports in the case of a change in supervision.⁴⁶ If the change occurs outside that window, the reporting senior must complete a new evaluation.⁴⁷

Each service has a different naming convention for the evaluations. While they are overall recognized as “evaluations” the naming convention differs for each service as delineated below:

USAF

- Officer Performance Reports (OPR)
- Enlisted Performance Reports (EPR)⁴⁸

USA

- Officer Evaluation Reports (OER)
- Non-Commissioned Officer Evaluation Reports (NCOER)⁴⁹

USN

- Officer Fitness Report (FITREP)
- Chief Petty Officer Evaluations (CHIEFEVAL)
- Evaluation (EVAL)⁵⁰

USMC

- Fitness Report⁵¹

The difference in the naming conventions highlights another difference between the services. The USA only has evaluations for non-commissioned officers (Corporals and up) and commissioned officers.⁵² For Specialists and below, supervisors conduct unit level counseling, but do not maintain those counselings as part of the individual’s permanent record.⁵³ In contrast, the USAF starts enlisted reports at a minimum of 20 months time in service (TIS).⁵⁴ The minimum TIS exists due to the USAF’s recent transition to batch reports for enlisted members.⁵⁵ The 20-month evaluations will be extended to the next static close-out date (SCOD) if it occurs outside of the batch window.⁵⁶

The services use stratification, or ranking (#1-n), of individuals on evaluations, however, it is inconsistent. The USN uses compulsory stratification, or “forced distribution.” This means that each reporting senior (the signatory authority) is required to provide a recommendation of “Significant Problems,” “Progressing,” “Promotable,” “Must Promote,” and “Early Promote” on

each individual FITREP.⁵⁷ The “must promote” and “early promote” recommendations have mandatory limits.⁵⁸ The USAF authorizes, but does not mandate, stratification (i.e., #1-n ranking), of individuals on performance reports.⁵⁹ When stratification is used, it must meet governing guidelines, for example, stratifications must be within the rater’s (signatory authority’s) scope of responsibility and must be place in quantitative terms.⁶⁰ There is no specific oversight on stratification distribution, meaning nothing prevents a rater from assigning a #1 to multiple individuals within the same rating period. While it would make sense to limit this in theory, in practice it is difficult because the USAF OPRs are not associated with a SCOD.

The forms used for evaluations differ between each service. Further, they differ internally by rank. Internally, the different forms are generally broken out by officer, junior enlisted, non-commissioned officers, and senior non-commissioned officer. Between the USA, USAF, USN, and USMC, there are nine separate forms, each requiring a different and comprehensive set of completion instructions. Although the USMC uses a single form (five pages long), the completion instructions vary by grade.

The services could gain several efficiencies by moving away from service-specific forms and procedures. Moving to three forms, broken out by officer (O-6 and below), E-1 through E-6, and E-7 through E-9, allows for differences in expected areas of competency (i.e., officers as managers, junior enlisted as technicians, and SNCOs as technical experts, managers). This reduces the amount of instructions needed for different forms by 66%. Further, all procedures should align, including batch dates by rank, policy on the required evaluations outside of the annual cycle (i.e., due to changes in supervision, negative information, etc.), when initial evaluations are completed for enlisted members, and standard stratification procedures.

Aligning the evaluation policies and procedures across the U.S. armed forces would reduce the overall amount of time the services would need to spend individually to review and update policy. Additionally, aligned evaluations are particularly important for joint units, as they would reduce the learning curve to complete each service-specific evaluation form and unique procedures. Further, all of the services have historically struggled with artificially inflated evaluations.⁶¹ Utilizing the same SCOD by rank and standard stratification procedures allows for easier cross-service stratification in joint units and ensures supervisors provide fair and appropriate stratifications in the evaluations. Further, during the process to adopt common forms, “best practices” to reduce artificial inflation should be taken into account, such as the USN’s forced distribution and trait averages.

Uniforms

Ground Combat Uniforms

Ground combat uniforms are a common requirement for the U.S. armed forces. The U.S. Congress has recognized the importance to “adopt and field a common combat and camouflage utility uniform or family of uniforms for specific combat environments to be used by all members of the armed forces.” This is due, in part, to the expense of uniform development and fielding (i.e., testing the utility). Between 2002 and 2012, the DoD spent over \$12.43 million for the development of 10 different ground combat uniforms.⁶² This does not include the cost of fielding, maintaining inventory, or distributing these uniforms.

Services often find after development and fielding that the updated uniform does not meet requirements. For example, after spending \$3.2 million for development of a ground combat uniform, the USA determined the need for an updated set of uniforms just four years later.⁶³ The USA is currently transitioning from the first generation OCP to the updated OCP.⁶⁴

Similarly, the USAF spent \$3.1 million developing the Airman Battle Uniform (ABU), however, Airmen only wear ABUs in garrison and select deployed locations. Most deployed Airmen currently wear the outdated USA Operational Camouflage Pattern (OCP).⁶⁵ As those uniforms become unserviceable, the USAF will phase in the updated USA OCP.⁶⁶

Service members requiring a camouflage combat uniform need it for land battles, making the functional requirements across the services identical. All deployed Airmen will operate as either ground forces or flight crew. Those who are flight crew wear a separate uniform designed for that specific function. Sailors arguably only need a camouflage uniform while disembarked for land operations. Their current uniform does not camouflage them against the backdrop of a grey ship, and there is little need for it to do so since the presence of the ship inherently identifies their whereabouts.

Opponents of a single ground combat uniform may cite tradition as an argument to maintain separate uniforms. “Tradition” should not be a factor when developing a uniform with functionality as the predominant consideration. Additionally, the services have updated their ground combat uniforms so often in recent history that there is little argument there is any remaining tradition to uphold.

The services should collaborate to develop a single, functional design for a ground combat uniform. Different camouflage patterns will allow adaptation of the same uniform design to diverse combat environments (i.e., woodland and desert pattern), and summer weight and winter weight fabric options would provide versatility in various climates.

The design of ground combat uniforms must be functional, which is common throughout ground forces. The USA has determined if it collaborated with at least one other service to develop and field a ground combat uniform, the projected savings would amount to \$82

million.⁶⁷ Moving toward a joint ground combat uniform for use across the U.S. armed forces would result in significant cost savings, as identified by the USA. Additionally, it would allow for a reduction in overall inventory required, streamline distribution, and increase availability to service members, particularly those assigned to a geographically separated location from their service (e.g., Airmen assigned to Marine Corps Base Quantico).

Physical Training Uniforms

Similar to combat uniforms, physical training uniforms must also be functional. Currently, each service maintains separate physical training uniforms despite the common requirement for such a uniform and the same functional purpose. A common uniform design would provide comparable efficiencies to a common ground combat uniform. Because the uniforms do not need to provide camouflage, the services would be able to maintain tradition and esprit de corps by adapting their own service colors and insignia.

Leave and Liberty

All service members are entitled to leave and liberty as delineated by U.S.C. Title 10 and 37, Joint Travel Regulation (JTR), and DoD Directives and Instructions. Despite the obligation to the same law and DoD policy, the services apply individual interpretation and in some cases are more restrictive than others in that interpretation. Additionally, each service uses their own forms and information systems to request, approve, and track leave and liberty. This requires service-specific procedures to be developed, and additional money to be spent maintaining multiple information systems that serve the same function.

In some cases, there is an unequal application of leave and liberty, as service policies create variation within the service as well as across the U.S. armed forces. For example, the USAF does not impose a specific mileage restriction for passes, leaving it to the commander's

discretion on what they deem to be an appropriate “reasonable time” to return if needed. Despite the authorization for passes to be granted, many commanders are hesitant to issue them to individuals, as there is no formal way in the USAF’s “LeaveWeb” information system to document them.

Another example of unequal application is found in USMC policy. The Marine Corps Order not only varies from other services, but also is also more restrictive than DoD policy and could result in Marines being charged unnecessary leave days, potentially adding up to a significant amount over the course of a career. DoDI 1327.06 states, “for leave ending on a non-duty day, the day of return shall not be charged as a day of leave.”⁶⁸ In contrast, the Marine Corps Order regarding leave states, “Leave will be charged for all calendar days, duty days as well as non-duty days.”⁶⁹ Therefore, if a Marine works a standard duty week of Monday through Friday, they would be charged leave on a Saturday if that were when they returned. In contrast, if an Airman worked that same duty schedule and returned on a Saturday, it would a non-chargeable day of leave. If this leave pattern occurred twice annually, it would result in an additional 40 days of leave over the course of a 20-year career. This is leave that could be taken as part of terminal leave, or sold back for more than a month’s salary upon retirement.

The Secretary of Defense (SecDef) recently supported an argument against service inconsistency in the application of leave. In January 2016, the Pentagon announced a 6-week reduction to the USN and USMC maternity leave policy in order to remove the disparity between the services.⁷⁰ When announcing this change, SecDef Ashton Carter stated, “I thought it was important that we have the same standard across the joint force.”⁷¹ This 6-week reduction is only two days longer than the example provided demonstrating how a Marine could realistically

be charged an additional 40 days over the course of a career, nearly the same amount of time the SecDef stated was significant enough to standardize across the services.

Overall there is a disparity in the application of leave and liberty policies, numerous variations in procedures, and multiple service-specific information systems to track and approve leave and liberty. The difference in application of policy are particularly concerning, as leave is an entitlement. Charging leave in an inconsistent manner is comparable to unequal pay, and as outlined above, can occur inside the same service. Even more striking, members of the same command, when in a joint environment, can be charged leave in an unequal manner due to service-specific policies. Aligning leave policy and procedures is imperative for this reason alone, however there are additional benefits for the services to gain.

Currently, joint units are obligated to maintain a separate information system and tracking process for all four services. Additionally, despite the common JTR and DoDI, commanders and administrators must understand the nuances of each service-specific process. Fully aligning leave and liberty policy and procedures, and utilizing a single information system to process leave and liberty not only ensures equal application of an entitlement, but also eliminates redundancy and creates efficiencies across the services. Moving to a single information system would also reduce the investment required to maintain four separate systems.

Personnel Records

Personnel records are another common requirement across the services but come in the form of vastly different products. Not only is the requirement the same, but also many of the information fields used in the records are identical. However, if a Soldier were to review an Airman's record, s/he would likely to be unable to identify much useful information from it since

the appearance is so dissimilar and there are so many acronyms and codes used to consolidate a large amount of data into a single page. Each service utilizes different information systems to produce a single, concise document, with information the service prioritized for inclusion. These documents are unique to the individual service. There are even circumstances in the services where a single branch would produce multiple formats of these documents with nearly identical information reflected in them. An example of this is the USAF's Single Unit Retrieval Format (SURF) and the Officer Selection Brief (OSB). The SURF is easily accessible at base level, and is typically requested by senior officers when conducting a records review for hiring, evaluation, or disciplinary decisions.⁷² However, senior rater's are not authorized to view SURFs for promotion consideration, as there is potential for data on it to be masked during a promotion cycle.⁷³ Therefore, another form from an entirely separate system is produced for promotion purposes. There are actually three versions of this form, depending on when in the promotion process the form is produced. These forms are the Duty Qualification History Brief, the Officer Pre-Selection Brief, and the Officer Selection Brief.⁷⁴ The three forms are identical with the exception of the title.

The USA's version of the SURF is the Soldier Record Brief (SRB), which is further delineated as the Officer Record Brief and Enlisted Record Brief.⁷⁵ The SRB is comprised of 11 total sections, which include overseas assignment information, career field data, security data, service data, personal/family data, foreign language, military education, civilian education, awards and decorations, assignment information, and remarks.⁷⁶ These sections are nearly identical to what is provided on the USAF's SURF, DQHB, OPB, and OSB. The USN and USMC also produce similar forms in different formats.

In addition to maintaining service-specific systems and records, joint commands must also run an entirely separate personnel and manpower information system, known as the Fourth Estate Manpower Tracking System (FMTS). FMTS is designed to “provide users with the capability to manage manpower and personnel data.”⁷⁷

By simply adopting the same format, the services would also be able to implement the same update procedures and use a single information system to maintain and produce the data. Further, it would vastly improve efficiency and accuracy in joint units by eliminating the need to maintain a separate manpower and personnel system in addition to the individual service systems that they must currently support. A common form would also enable joint commanders to more readily understand individual records.

Conclusion

Standard personnel policies, procedures, and information systems across the branches allow change to be implemented in a much easier manner. There is only one system to adjust; therefore any changes can be made more quickly and with less manpower. Additionally, having a single set of policies and procedures in place ensures that any changes to the system are deliberate, and second and third order effects can be critically and fully analyzed prior to implementation. Using the same policies and procedures reduces the amount of time drafting changes, even if the format itself is different. The services should, however, consider adopting the same format for regulations to gain further efficiencies, particularly if they are created in an electronically template format where service-specific information could be easily manipulated (i.e., the term Marine vs. Airman). Additionally, aligned policies and procedures reduce the learning curve for individuals in joint commands. This applies not only to the technician processing promotions, evaluations, leave, and personnel records, but also to supervisors and

commanders. Aligning personnel policies and procedures would free manpower and resources for operational support to the mission. Within a combatant command, aligned policies and procedures would likely result in a reduced billet requirement for the Manpower and Personnel Directorate (J1).

Joint commands would see additional benefits when making hiring decisions, as they would be able to focus on the content of individual records instead of spending time trying to interpret the service-specific nuances of the records. Additionally, as congress continues to adjust end strengths, aligned personnel policies and procedures would allow for easier transitions through interservice transfers.

Once personnel policy and procedure alignment efforts have been implemented across the active duty armed forces, they should be considered for the guard and reserve for each respective service, as well as the United States Coast Guard, for applicable personnel policies, procedures, and information systems. Personnel policy and procedures could also be consolidated for the civilian employees systems for each armed force. Consolidation could potentially be furthered through the United States Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Commissioned Officer Corps as part of the United States Uniformed Services. Further areas of consideration for unification include training requirements mandated by DoD, such as SAPR, suicide awareness, human trafficking, etc.

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