



**STRATEGY  
RESEARCH  
PROJECT**

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**PREPARING THE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER CORPS  
FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

**BY**

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**20010430 113**

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**Preparing the Noncommissioned Officer Corps For The 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

by

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## ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: LTC Frederick J. Maxwell  
TITLE: Preparing the Noncommissioned Officer Corps for the 21<sup>ST</sup> Century  
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project  
DATE: 9 March 2000                      PAGES: 33                      CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

Army Transformation is changing the face of our military profession. During this time in history, the military profession is facing tremendous challenges. While much has been publicized about the impact of Transformation on the officer corps, senior leaders must be conscious of the implications of Army Transformation on the "backbone of the Army", the noncommissioned officer. This paper looks at the noncommissioned officer corps in context of its transition from the Cold War Era to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It addresses contemporary issues affecting noncommissioned officers and makes recommendations that strengthen the NCO Corps through education, professional development and senior leader involvement.



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## PREFACE

This research project is the culmination of a study of existing thoughts on professional development and education of United States Army noncommissioned officers to meet requirements of Army Transformation and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Mr. Bruce E. McLelland provided valuable guidance and direction on this project. Special thanks to COL William F. Briscoe and SGM Danny Hubbard from the Army Training Doctrine Command, CSM Miguel Buddle, Communications Electronics Command, and Edward C. Papke, Sergeant Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas. Their advice and assistance were invaluable.



## PREPARING THE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER CORPS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

### ARMY TRANSFORMATION AND THE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER CORPS

The first annual nominative Command Sergeant Major conference, conducted 8-12 January 2001, was considered a huge success.<sup>1</sup>

According to Command Sergeant Major Jimmie W. Spencer, USA, Retired, Director of Noncommissioned Officer and Enlisted Affairs, Association of the United States Army, it was the first opportunity for many senior NCOs to inquire and receive feedback on Army policies.

The backbone of the Army is  
the non-commissioned man."

—Rudyard Kipling  
13 Sep 1896

Sergeant Major of the Army Jack L. Tilley stated this exposure would lead to direct ownership of the Army changes that are taking place with Army Transformation, because our Army's senior noncommissioned officers better understand the rationale behind the cause and effect of the issues.<sup>2</sup>

At a time when the Army is struggling to tell its story and to get its senior officers to "buy into" the Transformation process, it seems ironic that the backbone of the Army, the noncommissioned officer corps, is just now getting together to face the issues.

Much has been written about the challenges that Army Transformation imposes on the officer corps. Little has been published, however, about the significant challenges facing the noncommissioned officer corps and its place in the new, transformed Army. The purpose of this paper is to fill part of that void in contemporary writings on the NCO corps.

### THE ARMY VISION

Today's environment presents tremendous new challenges to the military profession. The Army's role, simply to fight and win wars, is no longer as clear. At present, the military vocation may be defined as "the management and application of military resources in deterrent, peacekeeping, and combat roles in the context of technological, social, and political change."<sup>3</sup> Based upon this definition, today's professional soldier may serve in many diverse roles. To better serve in these roles, the Army is changing. Army Vision 2020 calls for a transformation to a force that will be more responsive, deployable, agile, versatile, lethal, survivable, and sustainable than the current force.<sup>4</sup> The transformation objective is to develop and field a force that embodies the decisive warfighting capabilities found in today's heavy forces and the strategic responsiveness found in today's light forces.

## **THE ROLE OF THE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER**

To be successful, quality leadership of small units is more important than ever before. If the U.S. Army is to be recognized as a great army in all respects, senior leaders must recognize and acknowledge the vital and primary functions of the NCO Corps. In any army, the NCO is the critical element in integrating the enlisted soldiers into the rest of the organization. This integration includes melding the soldier with the unit's officers, weapons, organizational objectives, and the goals and values for which it is prepared to fight. Army Field Manual 22-600-20, The Army Noncommissioned Officer Guide, affirms this basic function of the NCO: "Sergeants must have the skill, ability, and leadership to train soldiers for combat and lead them in combat . . . fire teams, squads, crews, gun sections . . . fight together as teams, using their equipment to high standards of excellence."

Historically, the role of the noncommissioned officer has been to provide leadership and training to junior enlisted soldiers. Sergeants provide the essential linkage between the commander and his soldiers. While this role is not changing, the NCO can no longer expect to be successful with basic leadership skills and training ability, as were his predecessors. Further, with the Army's expanded roles in today's world, noncommissioned officers must possess knowledge, training, and technical as well as interpersonal skills, on a much greater scale. They must also be more adaptive in nature and possess a greater depth of insight than in the past.

In today's highly publicized military operations, we are bombarded with media accounts of American soldiers "walking point," that is, in the forefront of military operations across the full spectrum of military operations. They must deal with situations and events that have potential for immediate, worldwide consequences. For example, a squad leader responsible for a checkpoint might repeatedly be compelled to make decisions with second or third order effects. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, professional military education alone will not be sufficient to develop noncommissioned officers to deal with both their traditional military roles as leaders and trainers and non-traditional roles as de facto policy makers.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

As the Civil War is often described as the first modern war, World War I could be considered the first technological war. The Army created technical specialists who trained and supervised soldiers in newly-emergent technical occupations such as radio operators, truck drivers and mechanics.<sup>5</sup> The increased use of technology in warfare opened a division between

NCOs who were troop leaders and those who were specialists. Often, young soldiers with special technical skills received NCO status and higher pay than troop leaders with many more years of service and experience. Consequently, there were impacts on the morale of the combat leader. Compared to their British and French counterparts, the hastily promoted American noncommissioned officers were only half-trained. In response, General John J. Pershing directed the establishment of special schools for sergeants to improve small unit leadership and NCO professionalism.<sup>6</sup> This was a step in the right direction; unfortunately, the sergeants' schools were held only within the American Expeditionary Forces in France, and after the Armistice they were discontinued.

Although some leadership training was made a part of all unit training cycles before deployment, special schools for NCOs were not revived during World War II. In 1947, the Army opened an NCO academy system in occupied Germany. The intent of the program of instruction was to develop service-wide standards for NCO education. This one-month course emphasized leadership skills such as map reading and methods of small unit training. While the course content was useful, some major problems remained unsolved. Too few

No other grouping within the Army has received so little, worked so hard, demanded less and remained more faithful than today's noncommissioned officer corps.

—Infantry Magazine  
Jan-Feb 1974

academies were opened to reach most NCOs, the quality of instruction was uneven, and the academies prospered or suffered depending upon the changing budgets of parent commands.

The rapid expansion of the Army during the Vietnam War allowed little time for training and seasoning of noncommissioned officers. As a result, the Army expanded its NCO schools to produce great numbers of enlisted leaders. Individuals who possessed leadership skills were identified during Advanced Individual Training (AIT) and upon graduation from a short course, were awarded Sergeant stripes. These sergeants often experienced difficulty in gaining acceptance from other, "hard stripe" NCOs. Derisively nicknamed "Shake and Bakes," they had not earned their stripes based on experience and the proverbial "school of hard knocks."

### **NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER EDUCATION SYSTEM (NCOES)**

Shortages of trained NCOs during the Vietnam era led to the development of the Army's NCO Education System (NCOES). Implemented in 1971, NCOES offered a three-level educational progression including both MOS-specific and nonspecific stages.<sup>7</sup> The Army Training Program (ATP) used since World War I was time-oriented, and the Army needed programs that required soldiers to train to standards. The Skill Qualifications Test (SQT)

replaced MOS tests to provide an indicator of soldier proficiency in 1977. In 1980, Self-development Test (SDT) replaced SQT with the intent of NCOs taking more responsibility for their own MOS and leadership development.

TRADOC began to establish a progressive and sequential Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) aimed at giving NCOs more attractive career opportunities while providing the Army with more capable NCOs. With the transition to the All Volunteer Army in 1973, NCOES was expanded to include MOS and professional education. Education levels included Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC), Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course (BNCOC), Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course (ANCOC), and the capstone Sergeants Major Course (SMC) at Fort Bliss, Texas.

The Sergeants Major Course is designed to prepare senior noncommissioned officers to work at the battalion, brigade, and division levels. The course provides a broad background on how the Army works. Only the best and brightest NCOs attend this course. Unlike the curriculums in the three lower level NCOES schools, students are able to concentrate on personal development rather than developing leadership skills.<sup>8</sup> For most of the students, with an average 20 years in service, it has been almost ten years since their last level of NCOES.

While NCOES improved the competence of the NCO corps, it did not provide clear patterns of career development and promotion potential. The Enlisted Personnel Management System (EPMS), introduced in 1975, resolved some of those issues. EPMS expanded professional opportunities while at the same time improving skill levels. It eliminated "dead-end" career fields by grouping together related specialties, thus opening career paths from E-1 to E-9 for all soldiers. At the same time, to remain eligible for promotion, soldiers had to demonstrate their abilities at required levels through Skill Qualification Tests (SQT).

In 1980, TRADOC introduced another professional system related to career management. The NCO Development Plan (NCODP) amounted to formal NCO leadership training. A "doing" rather than "testing" experience, NCODP enables NCOs to apply in their own units the training and skills learned in NCOES and EPMS. A major reason for the effectiveness of NCODP is its relation to tradition. NCOs had informally exchanged information on their duties for over two hundred years. With NCODP, sergeants gather in more formal sessions, usually within their units, to examine professional topics.

## **ARMY TRAINING**

The Army currently offers to enlisted personnel about 240 distinct military occupational specialties, as compared to 80 in the Navy and 150 in the Air Force (with the exception of RECON, the Marines only guarantee a field).<sup>9</sup>

The Army downsized from a force of approximately 780,000 in 1990 to one of about 480,000 today. The Army is focused on the Post-Cold War and has assumed roles of peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance. This is also a time of vastly reduced budgets and increased operating tempo (OPTEMPO). These factors naturally challenge our NCOs, who are responsible for individual training at the unit level.

Army training is often characterized as being event driven with units and their commanders (and trainers) looking forward only to the next major event, such as the next rotation to the National Training Center (NTC) or to an operation overseas. Short-term priorities dominate. Unit proficiency, professional knowledge, teamwork, and small-unit leadership do not grow and do not have a long-term cumulative effect on unit performance. Instead, there appears to be a series of short-term efforts to hold the system off, to hold assignments steady, and to train for an upcoming event (e.g., six months' preparation for the next deployment) after which the short-term rules, in effect during the preparation phase, are relaxed, and the system reasserts itself with massively disruptive effects on any unit proficiency gained. The treadmill then continues with the commander rapidly refocusing on a new short-tense event, with new people and new priorities.

## **NATIONAL TRAINING CENTER LESSONS LEARNED**

The issue of selecting the best-qualified small-unit leaders is directly related to effective unit training and ultimately with unit performance in combat. Substantial evidence exists that relates leader quality to unit performance in training and in combat.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most insightful "lessons-learned" documents to emerge from the National Training Center was produced as a result of observations over three years by the former chief observer/controller at the NTC.<sup>11</sup> Commenting on requisite training in order for units to perform well at the NTC, the former chief observer stated that it is "relatively easy" to train the battalion commander, his staff, and the company commanders to operate well. The difficult training necessary for performing well at the NTC is at the crew and platoon levels. In preparing their units for the NTC, the training deficiency that leaders can't overcome very easily is a lack of skill or a lack of ability to execute down at the lowest level. Units constantly face situations where task forces develop good plans that they cannot execute, simply because the skills are not there

at the lowest level to make it happen. These plans are generally not elaborate. Rather, they are basic attacking and defending schemes. If units don't have leaders at the platoon level (E-5 through E-7) who know how to quickly and effectively assess the situation and to supervise and make every minute count, it doesn't make any difference how well a task force commander laid out courses of action. They are not going to win when the opposing force (OPFOR) comes charging toward them with 160 vehicles. So observer-controllers urge units over and over again to work on building the primary building block, which is down at platoon level. If platoons can execute well, the other things fall into place fairly quickly.<sup>12</sup>

### **16<sup>th</sup> CAVALRY REGIMENT "CRUCIBLE PROGRAM"**

So, how should institutional training be adjusted to meet the convergent development needs of officers and noncommissioned officers? Current education programs have evolved into very responsive systems for preparing NCOs for combat, but are less effective in preparing them for other challenges they are likely to face. Senior NCO education needs to be more complete if our armed forces are to be successful in operations other than war. Many of the peace-related roles that our troops will be called upon to perform will require a greater amount of sophistication in troop leaders.

TRADOC and the Armor School at Fort Knox provide a good example of leader development with the 16<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment "Crucible Program."<sup>13</sup> This model creates self-confident, adaptive leaders for full-spectrum operations.

The "Crucible Program" replicates real-world military operations with officer, warrant officer, and noncommissioned officer student units under common cadre. In contrast to typical Army institutional training, this program de-emphasizes "peer level" training. It focuses instead on the real world experiences of leading soldiers of different ranks and knowledge levels.

The program also stresses experiential learning instead of "rote retention of knowledge" as experienced in typical Army classroom instruction. "Talking less and fighting more" puts more emphasis on experience gained in battle-simulated experiences dealing with non-peers in a professional relationship. Formal instruction to instill knowledge is still important, but knowledge alone cannot develop self-confident, adaptive leadership.

## **ARMY TRAINING METHODOLOGIES MUST CHANGE**

Army Transformation is based upon full spectrum dominance. The new ways of doing Army business will require closer management and understanding of broad-spectrum warfighting and logistics systems. Forces may operate under conditions of much greater risk. Objective, Legacy, and Interim Force requirements will pose historically unique problems on NCO training and proficiency. To be successful in the future, the Army must have leaders who are prepared to act with speed, precision, and confidence. Ever-changing missions and unforeseen shapes of the areas of military operations decry the necessity for Army enlisted leaders who are adaptive, innovative, flexible, and in-tune with their surroundings.

As former Sergeant Major of the Army, Silas L. Copeland said, "It will take the hearts, hands, and heads of every soldier to build a better Army."<sup>14</sup> Never in history has the role of the sergeant been more important, for in today's operations, especially Military Operations in Other Than War (MOOTW), the actions of our lower level leaders can define national policy. These full spectrum operations will exacerbate training challenges.

The Army must evolve current leadership training methodologies to meet the challenges of Army Transformation. Interim and Objective Forces systems will require much more understanding and proficiency on the part of NCOs. Doctrine is changing as these smaller, lighter, more flexible systems are being developed. Legacy Force doctrine and training requirements may remain much the same until the Army is fully transformed to the Objective Force. With concurrent fielding of three dissimilar systems, soldiers will potentially be responsible for very different tactics, techniques and procedures.

Army Transformation will result in units that will be lighter, smaller in size, have fewer systems, and be more tailorable. More than ever before, sergeants will need to know how to work together. With budget cuts and training curtailed by real world operations, training becomes more critical and there isn't time, or resources, to "redo" or retrain. Consequently, we all must do a good job the first time. This doesn't mean we should have a "zero defect" Army; rather it means we need to do a better job training.

Emerging technology is revolutionizing war fighting and demanding new training methods. The ground combat soldier will not disappear, nor will the need for trained, competent leaders and trainers. In today's Army, with ever increasing reliance on science and technology even combat leaders must be technically savvy. The Army is no longer platform oriented.

Soldiers must know and understand the interrelationship of systems. For example, a young sergeant assigned today to an infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) must know how to operate and maintain the vehicle itself. He must also know how to operate the weapons systems,

communications equipment, and ancillary devices such as night vision devices and Global Positioning System (GPS), and how they interrelate in the larger scheme. Consider the training and leadership responsibilities of the noncommissioned officers in the Reconnaissance, Surveillance, Target Acquisition (RSTA) squadron. It has ability to collect intelligence without having to fight will depends heavily on technology. The RSTA squadron, like the rest of the interim brigade, has no helicopters of its own.<sup>15</sup> Instead, it will have four Hunter unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to function much as the air troop does in a regular air cavalry squadron. A sensor platoon, equipped with ground surveillance radar and optical electronic detection systems will be able to detect humans as far as 6 kilometers out, vehicles as far away as 10 kilometers and electronic signal emitters as far as 15 kilometers. A nuclear, biological and reconnaissance platoon, outfitted with three vehicles especially designed for detecting weapons of mass destruction, completes the surveillance troop. The scouts and military intelligence specialists in the recon squads will have some high-technology equipment of their own, including video cameras, stabilized binoculars that can capture a photographic image and tactical satellite communications. They will also use tactical hand-held devices known as Multilingual Interview Systems to help translate basic questions and answers.

In the examples above, teamwork and proficiency will be critical components of any military operation. High performance will require great technical and tactical training, as well as high maintenance. Operating in a dispersed manner, noncommissioned officers will have enormous responsibilities never before demanded at their level.

Force sustainment, from home station to combat, is another area of great change. In the transformed Army, sustainment will be done through focused logistics. Stocks in all classes of supply and services will be reduced. While it is a lethal force and no present-day potential adversary would want to face it, the digital division maintains only three days of supplies. Old ways of doing business, with 30-60 days of supply, just don't fit with new concepts.

Technology and challenges, as described above, will increase NCO responsibilities in the coming months and years. Moreover, Army Transformation will compel NCOs to become more adaptable and multi-skilled than ever before in history.

Commanders at all levels must provide support to their NCOs as they grow. Leaders must hold NCOs accountable and responsible, but, in turn, must give them accountability and responsibility. We cannot afford to expect NCOs to simply respond to orders as did their forefathers. They need to know and understand the "hows" and "whys."

## **WHAT QUALIFICATIONS MUST NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS POSSESS?**

The noncommissioned officer should possess general skills including the ability to evaluate people and information, and to communicate effectively. The NCO must be able to grasp large and complicated situations. Seeing the "big picture" means making cognitive connections among- and balancing-its diverse components. Further, he must understand technical, organizational and social relationships. This requires some degree of socio-political sophistication. Enlisted leaders must be able to adapt to political and technical situations while adhering to the Army's traditions, doctrines and missions. They must be aware of the joint and international nature of military planning and operations and be free from Army parochialism. Additionally, while they may be required to relate professionally with allies, they should avoid politico-military interchange.

We expect our NCOs to be versatile and able to consistently demonstrate job motivation. We expect them to exercise creativity under the capable leadership of professional officers. A professional noncommissioned officer must possess a wide range of knowledge and be able to absorb new data and concepts quickly. Also, he must lead and motivate his charges through patience and intellectual leadership. Persuasion, not orders, is often the best motivational strategy. Finally, today's noncommissioned officer must obey his superiors and bring his best judgment as a military expert to bear on Army policy decisions.

Individual on-the-job productivity exercises such personal attributes as ability, motivation, physical coordination, and other job-specific skills. But how can commanders measure potential productivity? Civilian employers who lack information on the potential productivity of job applicants may use various proxies for these skills. Education, for example, may be an indicator of productivity if individuals learn skills in school which may be applied to the job.<sup>16</sup>

## **CIVILIAN EDUCATION**

Sergeants' first priorities are to lead, train, and care for their charges. The competitive nature of the Army, however, demands that they obtain the added edge that continued education provides.

Education is an important and integral part of military life. It sharpens skills and abilities and maximizes individual potential, which, in turn, may affect promotions and career development. Educational experiences in the military classroom and on the job are only one small part of the total educational opportunities provided to today's soldier. In fact, at most Army installations, soldiers can earn a college degree without ever leaving the post. Soldiers should not view their tours in the Army as time lost. In fact, increasing emphasis on higher education

seems to ensure that soldiers taking off-duty college courses stay competitive in the promotion arena.

The Army takes its commitment to education seriously. More importantly, it is committed to the development of the individual soldier. Through various programs, the Army can fund a soldier's civilian education. Soldiers who take advantage of these opportunities will earn college credits, promotion points, and eventually, college degrees.

Limited education puts limits on where individuals go with their lives. Civilian education enhances the individual's personal and professional value. This is important in the military, not so much for a "check the block" entry on his service record, but as an accomplishment for the individual. Higher education puts additional tools in an individual's "kit bag" and these tools will assist in the performance of everyday duties as well as increase the individual's self worth. Civilian education facilitates one's ability to grasp abstract concepts and to apply rational problem solving skills. Higher education increases thinking skills and encourages imagination, innovation, and vision.

When we talk about how outstanding our soldiers are, we need to keep it in context and understand what we are really saying. Soldiers are smarter because of education. Civilian educational initiatives are important to the professional growth and development of the military. But they present challenges to retention. Anecdotal information from NCOs indicates dissatisfaction with perceived college requirements. Some feel that those who have invested in civilian education may have better chances for promotion, but while many attend classes during duty hours, not all NCOs have the opportunities to take advantage of these courses. Secondly, the fast pace in most units often precludes any expectations of stability to allow attendance.

Senior leaders should place an even greater emphasis on civilian graduate education for our NCOs than it has in the past. Tuition Assistance must continue in order to build and future NCO Corps that knows how to think. NCOs, regardless of MOS, should be encouraged to attend civilian graduate schools. Specialist career patterns could provide selected NCOs with the opportunity to attend civilian schools and gain expertise in their fields. Civilian education should not be viewed as a luxury or limited to a certain number of slots annually. Nor should it be rigidly programmed into a soldier's career pattern.

Commanders and supervisors should continue to allow soldiers to exploit the Internet. The Army is making great strides in providing education opportunities via the Web. Interactive training courses need to be widely available on the Net, and these courses should be interactive, not be just documents posted on servers.

First, these can provide self-development mechanisms to introduce above-grade NCOs to the skills needed for their jobs. Distance learning mechanisms can help above-grade NCOs acquire the necessary skills. Second, for those NCOs who have mastered the needed skills on the job, the NCO education system can be adjusted to provide up-front proficiency testing and enhanced curricula for those NCOs with demonstrated proficiency in the skills. Simply put, they learn prior to attending classes. Third, the Army can relax its NCO education attendance policy to allow above-grade NCOs to attend early on in their assignment.

As the Army moves more and more toward distance education, leaders will have to solve problems. Automation and its infrastructure are not inexpensive. OPTEMPO may impact on the soldier's time to learn on the internet. Therefore, will soldiers be expected to participate during non-duty hours or will commanders authorize time during the duty day? Finally, will distance learning relieve the schoolhouse of its training responsibilities while placing a heavier load on the unit and individual?

#### **PREPARING FOR JOINT ASSIGNMENTS**

NCOs complement their officers. Those slated for first sergeant positions attend a Company Commander/ First Sergeants Course. The Sergeants Major Academy prepares senior NCOs for battalion and brigade responsibilities. Unfortunately, most NCOs arrive at joint assignments with no formal NCOES schooling/training needed to perform those assignments. NCOs learn that operating in a joint assignment is as much a cultural change as doctrinal, and they must know how to operate without circumventing the system. They often do not understand the roles, customs, and rules of a joint nature, and the skills and techniques these NCOs should have developed in a formal NCOES setting must be learned on the job.

One way to promote joint training is to add another professional development course similar to Battle Staff Course. The purpose would be to balance educational, personnel, and resources requirements to increase access to quality professional military education that complements the Officer Joint Professional Military Education (JPME).

A second alternative might include joint training for all senior NCOs, conducted as part of NCOES. This would provide a balanced curriculum and would ensure knowledge of joint operations for all senior NCOs. These courses could be conducted at Senior NCOES resident schools. In order to reduce cost, these courses could be modified to include distance education for all, and allocated resident phases for senior NCOs scheduled for joint assignments.

## **CONTEMPORARY FACTORS AFFECTING THE NCO CORPS MANNING THE FORCE**

Downsizing is viewed by many in the military as a violation of their enlistment contracts. Throughout the last decade, officers and NCOs complained that units were suffering from "creeping hollowness." Their ability to train effectively and to build cohesion was reduced more and more by empty spaces in the ranks. Hopefully, the worst of Army downsizing is over, and the intense turmoil will subside. Partly due to the strong United States economy, the civilian sector provides a smaller source from which to recruit.

In November 2000, General Shinseki, the Army's Chief of Staff, stunned the service by declaring his intentions not to reverse the trends, but to do away with the shortages altogether.<sup>17</sup> General Shinseki's initiative to fully man the Army's 10 divisions and two armored cavalry regiments by October 2000 bit into the non-deployable parts of the Army. This plan caused enlisted strength at some Training and Doctrine Command installations to fall below 90 percent. With war-fighting units short thousands of soldiers, TRADOC in particular is feeling the squeeze. Cuts to the institutional Army- those organizations that teach, train, equip and manage the force – are inevitable. These shortages lead to personnel turbulence.

Shortfalls in unit strength has led the Army to consider eliminating some positions and turning others over to government civilians or private contracting agencies to make up for the cuts. Fortunately, the Army will restore about 4,000 noncommissioned officer positions previously downgraded in 1998 under the change in NCO structure initiative.<sup>18</sup> These NCO positions will be brought back into the force during the next three to four years.

## **PERSONNEL TURBULENCE**

The effects of turbulence among key leaders at the small-unit level are significant. Platoon leaders and sergeants, as well as squad leaders, view their individual units as more combat ready the longer they remain in that organization. Likewise, junior enlisted soldiers believe their immediate leaders are more effective leaders the longer the leaders remain in the unit.

Unit commanders are often criticized for their high rates of internal turbulence. This criticism is not well directed. Instead, we must recognize that the overall system (i.e., Army organization) forces the unit commander to sub-optimize. The system forces the commander to choose between maintaining personnel stability or operational readiness. The absolute requirement to keep systems operational and to meet countless other operational missions often forces commanders to adopt counter-productive policies such as cross-leveling to

reassign and cross-train soldiers. When such moves involve promotions, or prospects for promotion, the soldier himself is an eager participant in the turbulence.

While many commanders acknowledge the benefits of cohesion, there is not universal agreement about the desirability of reduced turbulence, and there does not appear to be a strong concern for cohesion when contrasted to the operational needs to keep tanks, artillery, and other equipment fully manned. Personnel moves caused by permanent change of station (PCS) and normal attrition account for only one third of the changes commanders must make to fill unit vacancies. This causes such turbulence that the unit's ability to create cohesive and high-performance is soon exceeded.<sup>19</sup>

### **RETENTION CONTROL POINT (RCP) CONCERNS**

Many senior NCOs express concerns about NCO retention. Some feel NCOs in hard-to-retain military occupational specialties (MOS) are forced to leave the Army when they reach their retention control point (RCP). RCP is the year of service in which an NCO must get out if he has not been promoted to the next higher grade. These NCOs are concerned about why the NCOs must get out if their skills are still useful to the Army.<sup>20</sup>

Often, these NCOs are discharged from active duty, despite the fact that they have the ability to provide valuable service for years to come. Moreover, shortened military careers crowd the professional development process and increase turbulence in the noncommissioned officer corps. This system is inordinately expensive, as highly trained and experienced soldiers are forced to leave the Army. Allowing some of these NCOs to stay three years beyond their RCP year improves the NCO Corps' experience levels.<sup>21</sup>

The Army is making progress in easing "up or out" policies. Retention control points for promotable staff sergeants and sergeants first class have been increased from 22 years to 24, and for staff sergeants in shortage MOS from 20 years to 22.<sup>22</sup> Army leadership should reconsider NCO retention control points in hard-to-retain and high-tech MOS. Forcing qualified NCOs to separate when they reach their RCPs is counter-productive, especially as the Army begins to exploit higher-technology systems and places increasing demands on some low density jobs. Less stringent requirements would allow the Army to continue to benefit from the experience of these senior NCOs.

Careers should be extended for soldiers with the capacity for continued service, though under such a system it would be crucial to develop mechanisms for selectively weeding out poor performers. Certainly, not all soldiers who reach their RCP years are worthy of retention beyond their RCPs.

Both improving E5/ E6 mid-career retention and relaxing E7/ E8 RCPs would lead to a more senior force. This enhanced seniority will increase compensation and retirement costs. Further, to improve mid-career retention of fast-tracking E5s and E6s in high-tech and hard-to-retain MOS will require additional incentives, and this means added costs. Incentives may take the form of enhanced education opportunities and improved self-development capabilities. They may also take the form of financial incentives targeted at fast trackers to induce them to stay in the Army. These cost increases will be mitigated somewhat by reductions in accession and training costs. This analysis has not addressed these cost issues.

### **OFFICER AND WARRANT OFFICER ACCESSIONS**

There are several Army programs that seek noncommissioned officers who have experience, ambition, and desire. While these programs offer great opportunities for enlisted soldiers to obtain college degrees, officer commissions, and greater pay and other benefits, they also claim some of the best and brightest enlisted soldiers. On the positive side, in respect to the NCO Corps, is the benefit of an officer corps with better understanding of NCO Corps.

The United States Military Academy at West Point yearly offers admission to 200 Regular Army soldiers.<sup>23</sup> While some of these soldiers are offered direct admission to the Academy, many choose to attend the United States Military Academy Preparatory School (USMAPA).

In some MOS, it is very difficult to get promoted, so as NCOs look toward career advancement and greater benefits they may consider the Warrant Officer Corps. Unlike Officer Candidate School (OCS), there is no age limitation on prospective Warrant Officers.

Warrant Officers come primarily from enlisted ranks between eighth and tenth years of service. According to CW5 Bill Walton, Chief of the Advanced Studies Branch at the Warrant Officer Career Center at Fort Rucker, Alabama, there are currently approximately 11,800 active duty and roughly 12,500 reserve-component warrant officers. Eighty to ninety percent of Warrant Officers come from the enlisted ranks.<sup>24</sup>

The Army tries to get soldiers into the warrant officer programs between their eighth and tenth years of service. While a soldier must have a four-year degree to become a regular commissioned officer, he can complete a four-year program after they become Warrants. Those desiring to enter technical fields must be sergeants or above. They must also have completed at least six college credits of English and must have held a leadership position for 24 months.

## **ARMY BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS**

Army Chief of Staff, General Eric Shinseki recently reported that the Army spent fourth quarter FY00 training dollars to pay for contingency missions.<sup>25</sup> General Shinseki added the Army's operating tempo hit unprecedented levels in FY 2000, with some 140,000 soldiers and civilian employees being stationed or deployed in nearly 80 countries. Because of this funding crunch, the Army may have to reduce several training, personnel and maintenance programs later this year. Units may see reductions in the number of unit training events, fewer permanent change-of-station moves, delays in purchasing of spare parts and depot maintenance, and a diminished civilian work force. We may also see a slower pace of promotions. These budgetary considerations do not bode well for addressing the military pay gap and the financial inequities facing our senior noncommissioned officers.

## **THE PAY GAP**

Officials and lawmakers in Congress are taking notice of the so-called "senior enlisted pay gap." A provision approved by the Senate in its version of the 2001 defense authorization bill would give targeted raises to most noncommissioned officers and petty officers beginning 1 Oct 2000. Instead of percentage increases in pay, however, they would get flat dollar amounts - \$31 a month for E-5s, \$49 a month for E-6s, and \$53 a month for E-7s.<sup>26</sup> The senior-most enlisted personnel, those in pay grades E-8 and E-9, will be left out in the cold because they were ignored by the study on which the legislation is based.

The current push to target mid-grade military members with pay increases results, in part, from the 1 July pay table reform wherein many commissioned officers received substantial raises. An O-6 with 14 years of service, for example, received a 5.4 percent pay increase - more than \$200 a month while an E-7 with the same time in service received only a 0.5 percent raise.

In an era of targeted pay, from the early 1980s until now, Congress gave across-the-board raises to the military. If an O-6 received a 3 percent pay hike, a private received the same. Since 1982, the average salary for a college-educated civilian has grown 20 percent more than that of a similarly educated officer according to a 1999 study by Rand, the defense research organization. That created the so-called officer "pay gap" of 20 per cent, corrected in part by the 4.8 percent across-the-board raise. The same Rand study concluded there was no pay gap for enlisted people as a whole. But a closer look reveals a huge change in the relationship between junior and senior enlisted members and their civilian counterparts.

Since 1982, the base year for the study, pay for enlisted people with more than five years of service has lagged 5 percent behind civilians with similar experience and some college credits on their resumes. In theory, the 4.8 percent raise in January, 2000 helped close that gap. During the same 18-year period, the pay of junior enlisted people moved 8 percent ahead of comparable civilian high school graduates with less than five years in the work force. From these figures, Rand concluded there was a 13 percent pay gap between junior and senior enlisted people. And the 1 January raise did nothing to fix it. Rand called the discovery troubling but noted that whatever compensation edge junior personnel enjoy is reversed as they look ahead to the prospects of remaining in the military.

While the July 1 raise primarily targeted career officers, junior NCOs received a healthy boost – in the realm of 2.5 percent. But more senior enlisted typically received targeted increases of about 0.5 percent, an average of about \$20 monthly. The Ninth Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation, due by the end of the year, will examine enlisted pay reforms.

The Army must invest in its NCOs. As the Pentagon spends more and more on recruiting, per-recruit costs are at an all time high.<sup>27</sup> Charles Moskos, a Northwestern University military sociologist, reports that eventually someone will have to come to the realization that we've overpaid recruits and underpaid sergeants.<sup>28</sup> He thinks that the Pentagon's focus on using financial incentives to lure recruits is misguided at a time when experienced mid-career noncommissioned officers are leaving in droves. Moskos notes that before the draft ended, an Army Master Sergeant earned seven times as much as a private. Today, a Master Sergeant earns only three times as much.

## **PROMOTIONS**

The Army needs to pay attention its enlisted promotion system. A recent review of personnel files indicates there are 78,000 eligible specialists and corporals without selection board scores.<sup>29</sup> The sergeant shortage is the direct result of the Changes in NCO Structure program that was launched five years ago to return the NCO Corps to pre-drawdown staffing levels. Three years ago officials realized those cuts were too deep, and the service has since tried to compensate with a "buyback" of about 4,000 positions.<sup>30</sup>

It is fixed at the higher enlisted grades, but the Army has too many vacancies at the rank of sergeant. According to data reported by field commands earlier this year, about 91,000 specialists and corporals met time-in-service or time-in-grade requirements for promotion, but only 16,300 – or 18 percent of those eligible – had appeared before local promotion boards.

This begs the question: Are we creating new and higher standards above what is required by regulation?

The goal of the new boarding policy is to sharply reduce that total by making commanders think about promotions and to board soldiers when they are fully qualified for advancement.

Additionally, recent changes to AR 600-8-19 have revised the Promotion Worksheet to allow enlisted soldiers to maximize promotion points.<sup>31</sup> Changes allow fewer points for duty performance and board points, but offers a greater payoff for awards and civilian and military education, thus providing greater incentive for individual self-improvement. The last time review and changes were made in March 1985.

Senior leaders need to become more actively involved with our promotion system. We must get more specialists boarded for promotion.

## **STABILIZATION**

The Army has made reducing personnel turbulence a major priority as it moves toward fielding an Objective Force by next decade. Shortly after becoming chief of staff in June 1999, General Shinseki launched the Army anti-turbulence program.<sup>32</sup> Incorporated into the Army Transformation Campaign, this program is intended to make soldiers' careers more predictable. To support the efforts he directed the Army War College to propose policy changes that would reduce job turnover and put more predictability into the lives of soldiers and their families. This plan would give soldiers predictability in career paths, reduce turnover and promote retention.

There are no easy answers to the turbulence problems, as many of the issues are complex, and require further work. The Army some assigned some of the issues to the RAND Corporation, an Army-funded think tank.

## **NEW GENERATIONS**

The pool from which the Army recruits is changing constantly. In some cases, these changes are demographic and reflect the results of immigration and other influences. In other cases, the changes are of a more social nature. For example, generational differences, attitudes, and expectations, may impose further skill set requirements on the Transformed Army, and its leaders, at every level.

Extensive research in demographics has yielded a wealth of knowledge concerning generational characteristics of Boomers, the "X" Generation, and now the "D" Generation. It is important that leaders realize that these are three distinct generations.

Baby Boomers, most of the senior officers and NCOs, grew up during a time of economic prosperity against a backdrop of rebellion and indulgence. Their views were shaped by events such as Vietnam, Woodstock, the Kennedy assassination, and Kent State. Boomer childhood consisted of nuclear families. In the work force Boomers worked relentlessly in pursuit of goals, often at the expense of marriages, family, and personal lives.

In contrast to all the attention heaped on the Baby Boomers as they grew up, Generation X arrived on the scene unnoticed. Sometimes called the Slackers, Baby Busters, Twenty-something or the MTV generation. Generation X developed a cynical, pragmatic, survivor mentality as they experienced a world much less idyllic than their Boomer predecessors. Watergate, Three Mile Island, Operation DESERT STORM and Rodney King shaped their thinking in their early years. With Boomer parents overworked and focused on accomplishing personal goals, Generation X children were often neglected and overlooked.<sup>33</sup>

The "D" Generation (Digital Generation) are those who were born in the computer age. They are familiar and comfortable with automation. They enjoy spending hours alone with their computers and form electronic relationships with others.

These differences are significant. Add to them the cultural diversity that America has experienced in recent decades and the leadership challenges are daunting. Leaders will, by necessity, need to apply new, innovative techniques to lead and influence soldiers. More importantly, dealing with these circumstances during the turmoil of Army Transformation may impose yet more consternation on junior leaders, who themselves will be comprised of generational mixes.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Despite today's uncertainties and the challenges discussed above, the outlines of future operations within the new world order are beginning to emerge. Military force is but one instrument among the many that the United States is likely to employ. It is clear that the military's role in the conduct of U.S. foreign affairs has changed. The Army is likely to continue to deploy forces, often as part of multilateral coalitions, for specific and achievable purposes. Forces will probably be more dispersed, and commanders will still be held accountable for needless collateral damage.

Second, the rate of technological change in the decades ahead will be an order of magnitude greater than that of the past decade and will continue to accelerate.

Together, these trends will alter traditional concepts of professional military expertise, making it more difficult to distinguish between warriors and non-warriors, commanders and non-

commanders, and technicians and non-technicians. Future military operations will require not only competencies outside the realm of traditional "military expertise" but also a level of political and technical sophistication unknown and wielded by military leaders in the past.

In many respects the NCO Corps is in overall better shape than ever before. As a result of a sophisticated development system NCOs are better educated and more highly motivated. They display great pride and confidence in their duties. NCOs today are better trained and more professional than at any time in our history. The NCO corps is comprised of professional volunteers who are highly skilled, technically and tactically proficient. They will continue to be the backbone of the Army. To do so, they must have continued training, education, and responsibilities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

What should Army leaders do to strengthen noncommissioned officer corps professionalism and to guarantee success during and after Army Transformation? First, our senior leadership needs to adopt a comprehensive development plan to direct and guide efforts to educate and train future noncommissioned officer leaders. Second, the Army should publish leadership development guides focused on 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership requirements. NCOs do not need generic checklists, but guides for building future leadership teams. Third, the Army should work with sister services and other defense agencies to create career-broadening opportunities which include NCOs. Lastly, NCO leader development should be a regular topic at senior officer level planning sessions.

Leaders must avoid micromanagement and a zero-defects mindset, which are, unfortunately, among the less desirable side effects of the turmoil created by the downsizing of the Army. Commanders must be concerned about the performance of their unit during their watch, but must learn to give sergeants their missions, then avoid the temptation to tell them how to do them or to require them to check in constantly with status reports

In return for enduring the hardships of military life and fulfilling the obligations of a professional soldier, Army leaders must provide our NCOs career opportunities and a reasonable modicum of security. The Army Officer Corps should strive to support the NCO Corps by continuing to stress traditional military values, and clarifying the meaning and importance of military professionalism, selfless service and absolute integrity. We, as leaders, must include NCOs in the decision-making process, whenever possible and appropriate, and increase the sergeants' input into key decisions. This is not to undermine the chain of

command, but rather to broaden the base of knowledge, expertise, and experience supporting our decisions.

Senior leaders must realistically mentor noncommissioned officers. Officers need to sit down with their NCOs and talk with them, but not as if they are being counseled. Mentoring is not performance counseling, nor is it the required monthly or quarterly counseling. This is merely an officer taking an interest in the life of a subordinate.

If the Army intends to remain the world's most capable and respected fighting force, every member of its leadership teams will need to possess an unprecedented range of skills and breadth of experience to bear on his responsibilities. The Army's Transformation enlisted leadership is being shaped today, and it will mature over the next decade. Without the active involvement of today's senior leadership, tomorrow's sergeants will not meet the challenges we will face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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