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BASIC TRAINING OF NON-PRIOR SERVICE PERSONNEL IN THE
RESERVE COMPONENT

by

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Abstract

The number of Reservists who have never served on extended active duty is growing as a percentage of the Total Force. In the spirit of transformation it is necessary to re-examine the traditional method of providing these non-prior service (NPS) Reservists with accession level training (i.e. boot camp). The traditional approach is inflexible and reflects a Cold War mentality about readiness but the alternatives methods are not clear. This paper, therefore, includes consideration of the Naval Reserve's non-traditional approach to enlisted NPS accession level training and compares it to the traditional approach used by the other elements in the Reserve component and discusses the trade-offs that the Services must make between the two approaches. Reflection on the possible role of the distance learning methodologies used in adult learning on the accession level training process is also included.

Introduction

The Reserve components require priority consideration during transformation to include full-spectrum integration while ensuring the current force has adequate resources to perform today's mission.

-- Thomas F. Hall¹

It is virtually impossible to read a discussion of current military trends without the concept of transformation being the central point of emphasis. There does, however, seem to be certain “incontrovertible truths” imbedded among all the debate about smart bombs, expeditionary capability and network-centric warfare. One of these truths is the idea that the *only* way to adequately provide basic training for enlisted personnel is through an orientation process whereby new recruits undergo a multi-week period of accession level training (i.e. “boot camp”) to prepare them for military service. Although the curriculum has changed over the years, this is essentially the same process that has been used to train enlisted personnel since the nineteenth century. Most enlisted Reserve component personnel undergo this same training process, even though they may or may not be in a position to immediately utilize their training as part of an active military unit. Because examining business practices is at the heart of the transformation effort, perhaps it is time to reconsider the methods used to provide basic training to Reserve enlisted personnel. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to contemplate the traditional “one size fits all” approach to accession level training for non-prior service (NPS) enlisted Reservists in order to reach a conclusion about its validity as a training methodology for the twenty-first century. The challenges of the current situation, the Naval Reserve’s non-traditional approach, the trade-offs, and possible alternatives to traditional accession level training will all be considered.

It should be noted that the scope of this paper only considers the boot camp portion of basic training. Extreme variation in the methodology of how the elements of the Reserve component provide follow-on technical training makes this aspect of basic training far too complex to include here. Nevertheless, the general points of discussion about accession level training can also be used as a starting point for re-evaluating the methods in which Reservists obtain necessary occupational skills training.

The Current Situation

The war is going well. We need to call up reserves to make sure it stays that way.

--General Barry L. McCaffrey²

A decade ago, the vast majority of Reservists had active duty experience prior to affiliation. The military drawdown of the 1990's is over and less prior-service candidates are available to meet Reserve manpower needs. For this reason, the Active and Reserve components are in more direct competition for NPS recruits.³ This situation also indicates that more innovative methods of training will have to be found to orient and educate enlisted NPS Reserve personnel unless the Reserve component is willing to make the deliberate decision that it will incur higher costs for NPS accession level training in future budgets.

Combined with this demographic trend of a growing enlisted NPS Reserve population is a statutory requirement that impedes meaningful change from the old paradigm concerning accession level training. Specifically, USC Sec. 671 prohibits assignment of military personnel to active duty outside the U.S. without completion of twelve weeks of basic training or its equivalent (84 calendar days). This section of public law dates to 1956 with the only substantive change in 1975 when the minimum period of basic training was reduced from four months to

twelve weeks.⁴ Because the Reserve component has advertised itself as being capable of immediate worldwide deployment, USC 671 has made the Services unwilling to consider alternative methodologies for enlisted NPS Reserve personnel. Operation Noble Eagle has proven that not all Reservists will be deployed overseas and the “one size fits all” deployment requirement may no longer be a valid yardstick for readiness.

In short, the Reserve component faces increased training costs for accession level training and statutory deployment requirements that hinder how the Reserve Force is able to approach this training. The current situation is ripe for transformation of enlisted accession level training for the NPS personnel in the Reserve component. Other approaches toward training should be considered.

Another Approach

As a whole the Naval Reserve’s IADT curriculum trains personnel recruited into the Naval Reserve with no prior service and turns them into Sailors.

--NPSAC Web Site⁵

The traditional “boot camp” approach to orienting individuals to military service is a familiar process. For Reserve NPS enlisted personnel, the 84-day statutory requirement is satisfied (or close to satisfied) under the traditional approach because of the amount of training required to accomplish both accession level training and follow-on technical training. This is the process used by all DOD Reserve elements except the Naval Reserve. The Navy has adopted a non-traditional approach for enlisted NPS Reservists.

Initial Active Duty Training (IADT), another term for accession level training, is divided into multiple phases. An NPS Reservist starts drilling immediately upon affiliation and

completes the first two phases of IADT in a classroom environment while drilling at the local Naval Reserve activity. The third phase of IADT, the Non-Prior Service Accession Course (NPSAC), is completed at the Naval Recruit Training Center, Great Lakes, Illinois, during a seventeen-day training period within the first year of affiliation. The benefit to this approach is that the first two phases have pre-trained the enlisted NPS Naval Reservist with basic information about the Naval service including drill, rank recognition, and the various other bits of information that absorb a great deal of time in the traditional boot camp process. Theoretically, Naval Reservists arrive at Great Lakes further along in the training cycle than their active duty counterparts. For this reason NPSAC can concentrate on specialized instruction like Shipboard damage control, seamanship, and other training unavailable at the local Naval Reserve activity. It should also be noted that this approach does not set up a double standard between the Active and Reserve components because the standards for graduation from NPSAC and traditional Navy boot camp are identical.

This approach to enlisted NPS accession level training grew out of a recruiting problem caused by a Navy-imposed prohibition on affiliating NPS personnel under the age of twenty-seven (to prevent competition with the Navy's active duty recruiters). A modified boot camp was created because individuals in their late twenties are far less able to take significant time away from their careers for accession level training. Nevertheless, it became a selling point for the Naval Reserve program. For example, the *Wall Street Journal* recently quoted an about-to-be deployed Naval Reservist as saying she chose the Navy because it was the only service that required just two weeks of boot camp (while the Army and Air Force required eleven).⁶ The Naval Reserve's approach, therefore, resolves both challenges of the current situation in a non-traditional method or, at least, provides an alternative approach worthy of comparison to the

traditional boot camp method utilized by all the other elements of the Reserve component. Nevertheless, there are trade-offs to the Navy's approach that must be considered.

Trade –Offs Between the Traditional and Non-Traditional Approaches

“That the Reserve components are relied upon to augment and even replace the active force in both war and peace is the result of an increasingly well-balanced Total Force.”

- Representative Bob Stump⁷

Obviously, a different set of advantages and disadvantages is attached to the traditional and non-traditional approaches to enlisted NPS Reserve accession level training. There is nothing wrong with this situation. The whole point of transformation and consideration of alternative methods of providing accession level training is to create a more flexible and responsive methodology that, hopefully, produces a qualified Reservist no matter what path is taken. The Services will need to consider the role of their Reserve and make trade-offs concerning cost, readiness, and training effectiveness.

The most obvious difference between the traditional and non-traditional approaches to accession level training for enlisted NPS Reserve personnel is that of cost. Without belaboring the point, the more time spent on active duty, the more expensive the training. Using the 2003 pay rate for an E-1 (under four years of service) of \$35.49/day, basic pay alone for traditional six-week accession level training program would be \$1, 490.58 compared to \$603.33 for the NPSAC approach.⁸ The trade-off, of course, is that the NPSAC Reservist is not as close to meeting the worldwide deployment criteria set forth in USC 671. The Services will have to determine if this capability is worth the additional expense.

This ability for worldwide deployment introduces the issue of readiness. Perhaps it is a vestige of Cold War attitudes or simply an easy way to account for personnel readiness but the idea that all Reservists must be immediately available for mobilization upon completion of basic training is extremely one-dimensional thinking. The reality is that not all units or individual Reservists in those units have the same probability for mobilization outside the United States. David T. Fautua, suggests a “tiered resourcing” approach where active and Reserve units are assigned to readiness categories based on the need for them to deploy and fight. The three categories suggested are “now” (first 60 days of the fight), “soon” (able to deploy by day 90), and “later” (up to six months preparation before deployment).⁹ It should be noted that NPS Reservists in the “soon” and “later” category who have not yet attained the requisite eighty-four days of active duty could be mobilized “early” to satisfy the statutory requirements and STILL mobilize with his or her Reserve unit. The trade-off for the Services, therefore, is whether or not completion of traditional basic training is an effective measure of readiness and simply not the most convenient.

This discussion of cost and readiness introduces a third issue, that of training effectiveness. This is probably the hardest area to quantify and, yet, the one that really matters most when discussing accession level training for enlisted NPS Reservists. Cost is irrelevant if the training is inadequate and, if training is inadequate, the individual is certainly not ready to deploy- no matter how many days of active duty have been accomplished! Evaluating training effectiveness for accession level training begins with the understanding that the purpose behind “boot camp” is to orient and indoctrinate an individual into their branch of the military; it’s history, traditions, and culture. By the end of training the new recruit has hopefully gotten past the superficial and is beginning to accept the group values and beliefs. In the Schein model, this would be getting

beyond the artifacts stage and entering inward-looking levels of organizational culture.¹⁰ For the Reserve components the trade-off is whether or not each additional day of accession level training is of value in assisting the Reservist on this journey. In making this determination, it should be remembered that accession level training in and of itself does not produce acceptance of organizational culture, it merely provides the framework and vocabulary from which an individual can continue the process. Perhaps other learning methods are as effective as accession level training.

Alternative Approaches

“Education should occur in distance learning. Learning is the goal, not teaching.”

- General Erik K. Shinseki¹¹

Discussion so far has introduced and compared the traditional approach of accession level training for enlisted NPS Reservists with the alternative IADT model utilized by the Naval Reserve. This discussion has also stressed the need for the Services to adopt a more flexible approach in training their enlisted NPS Reservists. In the spirit of transformation, however, it is also necessary to consider alternative approaches to education and training. Technology has revolutionized adult learning. Perhaps the Reserve components could incorporate some of this technology to provide all the benefits of current accession level programs by some other approach. While there are many creative ways for adult learning, it would defeat the intended purpose of transformation if implementation of a new methodology merely became a boon for contractors providing some new technology. For this reason discussion will be limited to approaches where the technology is already available at the local Reserve activity and/or in the

Reservist's own home. For the time being, this limits discussion to the traditional correspondence courses, distance learning, and a VTC hook-up approach.

Correspondence Courses need to be considered as an alternative simply because it is a methodology that can provide instruction to the NPS Reservist as part of the accession level process. Nevertheless, it can be quickly dismissed as a viable alternative because the purpose of accession level training is to indoctrinate a new individual into the organization. Even if a correspondence course could be designed so effectively that it provided perfect instruction, what kind of a tacit message is sent when nobody assists the individual become acquainted with the organization?

Asynchronous distance learning, meaning access is available at any time, is just slightly better an approach than correspondence courses for many of the same reasons. Computer-based training is an example of asynchronous distance learning. Typically in adult education courses, the student would have an "instructor" to e-mail questions, assignments, and other such activities. It should also be noted that asynchronous courses are time consuming to prepare, 150-200 hours for each hour of presentation, because the course designers can not tailor the presentation to the audience and has to include many more branches and sequels to anticipate varying levels of knowledge and to create a stand-alone product.¹² The bottom line is that accession level training cannot be successfully accomplished in a sterile environment. The new recruit needs interaction with more "seasoned" Reservists who don't mind answering questions on the spot and don't hesitate to take corrective action if and when they see the new recruit doing something incorrectly.

Synchronous distance learning has more promise because it is accomplished in real time. This type of training is akin to a specialized "chat room" with a live presentation and immediate

feedback. Nevertheless, as Nicholas Cravotta points out, “simply placing material on a computer screen is not teaching.”¹³ In terms of accession level training, it can also be said that simply placing a NPS Reservist in front of the computer does not indicate learning. Another drawback to both types of distance learning is the fact that studies show that although distance learning to be a viable alternative to classroom instruction, it must also be student-centered.¹⁴ That does not seem to be an appropriate match for accession level training where individual attention is important but so is face-to-face interaction and activity in order to develop group cohesion and identity.

It is safe to conclude at this point that correspondence courses and distance learning via computer are inappropriate methods in which to conduct accession level training. The very reasons why it is convenient for obtaining college credit from home make it incompatible with indoctrinating enlisted NPS Reservists. Before completely abandoning the idea of distance learning as a tool for accession level training, however, it is necessary to examine the approach the Air National Guard uses to export its NCO Academy to remote locations. Specifically, the course is offered via satellite to remote locations where students attend four-hour sessions two nights a week for four months.¹⁵ While satellite hook-up isn’t possible throughout the Reserve component, it would be possible for VTC technology to be used for the same purpose. Local training in an accession level program like the Naval Reserve’s IADT course could be augmented with other valuable opportunities like “town hall” meetings with the Reserve Component’s senior leaders.

On first glance, distance learning in any of these formats seems an inadequate substitute for some variation of the traditional version of enlisted NPS Reserve accession level training. Before leaving the subject entirely, however, perhaps the problem is not the format but the use.

Distance learning is an exciting concept for the military because it is possible for individuals to attend training without sending them away from their home units, no matter how remote. Distance learning may seem inadequate in terms of accession level training because of the military's propensity for "zero sum" programs. In other words, if accession level training is to be offered through distance learning, there is no room for other methodologies as part of the same program. Perhaps transformation efforts should create a new paradigm where learning methods are more integrated.

It would be easy to demonstrate this idea of a more integrated approach to accession level training using the Naval Reserve's IADT program because that organization has already broken away from the concept that enlisted Reservists must attend the full-fledged active duty boot camp. Furthermore, the Naval Marine Corps Internet initiative means that even remote Naval Reserve activities have VTC and SIPIRNET capability. Instead, the challenge is to apply this idea of integrating distance learning into the traditional approach to enlisted NPS Reserve accession level training.

Consider a new NPS recruit that has affiliated with an element of the Reserve component. While waiting to attend boot camp, the individual could attend regular drills of his or her home unit (for the interaction necessary for accession level training) while some version of distance learning is utilized to complete prerequisite training that would lessen the length of time required for boot camp by setting the bar higher from the beginning of boot camp. This combination of drill and distance learning activities would satisfy the eighty-four day rule while allowing the individual to become acquainted with both the Reserves and his or her home unit. It would even be possible for the home unit to designate a senior NCO to act as coordinator to monitor the progress of NPS personnel to ensure NPS personnel have the skills and mindset necessary to

excel in boot camp. Distance learning could also be utilized after the fact as “wrap up” training could be conducted via distance learning to gauge what aspects of boot camp were most valuable for Reservists.

Conclusions

“It’s tough to make predictions, especially about the future.”

- Yogi Berra¹⁶

From the foregoing discussion, it is possible to draw several conclusions about providing accession level training for enlisted NPS Reservists. The underlying theme for these conclusions is the same: flexibility is the key to success and one size does not fit all. Hopefully, these conclusions can also act as guidelines for the Reserve component to consider while it is transforming along with the rest of the military.

The first conclusion is simply that accession level training for enlisted NPS Reservists must change from the traditional approach used by most elements in the Reserve component. The traditional approach reflects Cold War attitudes that are no longer relevant. The traditional approach is a deterrent for adults in their mid-twenties and older from entering the Reserve component because they can not or will not take the time required to go through months worth of basic training. Furthermore, the traditional approach is wasteful use of resources because not all enlisted NPS Reservists need to complete accession level training as if they were to be mobilized immediately upon graduation from basic training- there is time for a slower approach.

The second is conclusion is based on the first. Accession level training for the future must be relevant and effective. The outcome from accession level training should be an NPS

Reservist able to seamlessly integrate into the Total Force concept without “shock and awe” that he or she has never been on extended active duty. The accession level training must also be effective in preparing the NPS Reservist for participation in the Reserve component without the benefit of extended active duty to acclimate the individual to the organizational culture.

The third conclusion is that new training methodologies are available and should be incorporated into the accession level training process. Distance learning makes it possible, and even desirable, for certain aspects of the training process to occur before the enlisted NPS Reservist reports for boot camp. The Reserve component can save significant training dollars if they are able to shorten the boot camp process by leveraging new technologies and the expertise of local Reserve unit personnel to train an enlisted NPS Reservist to a higher level of knowledge during regularly scheduled drill time.

The final conclusion concerning accession level training is, actually, more of a cautionary note. This training is the starting point for inculcating the organization’s core values into the individual’s ethos. All the good work of boot camp can be undone quickly if the individual does not see the same standards applied to the “real” organization. The Reserve component leadership, at all levels, must ensure that the unit is indeed practicing the information the NPS Reservist learned at boot camp.

The enlisted NPS Reservist is an important element in force shaping the Reserve component of the future. The NPS Reservist usually brings valuable civilian-based skills that are critical to the Reserve component’s duty of providing for the national security. This makes accession level training for these enlisted NPS Reservists a key mission area that must be treated seriously and not as a collateral function. Assistant Secretary of Defense (Reserve Affairs) Hall’s comments to the Reserve Officer Association probably best sums up the goal for the Reserve component when

he states that the acid test is to not only ask “do we have the right Reservist” but also “do we have the right programs that will recruit, train, compensate, and support Reservists and their families in a cradle-to-grave process.”¹⁷ Part of that cradle-to-grave process for enlisted NPS Reserve personnel is the creation of an accession level process that is flexible, responsive, and prepares the NPS Reservist for his or her job in the full spectrum from peace to war.

Notes

¹ Thomas F. Hall, Asst. Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, "The Right Mission, Training, and Equipment," *The Officer* 80, no. 1 (January/February 2003): 24.

² General Barry L. McCaffrey, Editorial, *Wall Street Journal*, 1 April 2003.

³ "Characteristics of Selected Reserve Accessions." *Population representation in the Military Services*, 2000, n.p., on-line, Internet, 10 March 2003, available from http://www.defenselink.mil/prhome/poprep2000/html/chapter5/c5_accessopms.htm

⁴ General Military Law, *U.S. Code Title 10 --Armed Forces*. Sec 671

⁵ *Non-Prior Service Accession Course (NPSAC) Homepage*, 23 March 2003, n.p., on-line, Internet, 23 March 2003, available from <http://www.npsac.navy.mil>.

⁶ Greg Jaffe, "Today, Military Kids Often Say Goodbye to Dad- and Mom," *Wall Street Journal*, 11 March 2003.

⁷ Representative Bob Stump, "The United States Reserve, Overcoming Challenges as Part of the Total Force." *The Officer* 80, no. 1 (January/February 2003): 14.

⁸ "2003 Military Pay Rates." *The Naval Reservist* 28, no. 1 (January 2003): 11

⁹ Fautua, David T, "How the Guard and Reserve Will Fight in 2025," *Parameters*, Spring 1999, 134.

¹⁰ Yolitz, Major Brian D, "Organizational Change: Is the United States Air Force Doing it Right?" in *The Military Leader: Foundations*, ed. Sharon McBride (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air Command and Staff School, August 2002) 1-2.

¹¹ Quoted in R. Steven Whitcomb, "Distance Learning- a Tool for Today and Tomorrow," in *Armor* 111, no. 6, (Nov/Dec 2002) 5.

¹² Nicholas Cravotta, "Debunking the Distance Learning Myth," *EDN* 48, no. 1, (1/9/2003): n.p.

¹³ Cravotta, n.p.

¹⁴ Heidi Perreault, et. al. "Overcoming Barriers to Successful Delivery of Distance-Learning Courses," *Journal of Education for Business* 77, no. 6 (Jul/Aug 2002): 314.

¹⁵ Bob Haskell, "Seasoning Sergeants," *Citizen Airman* 53, no. 3 (Jun 2001).

¹⁶ Quoted in General Richard B. Meyers, "An Example Worth Noting: Reserve Transformation," in *The Officer* 80, no. 1 (January/February 2003): 22.

¹⁷ Quoted in "Re-Evaluating the Reserve Forces' Role" in *The Officer* 80, no. 2 (March/April): 15

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