

SEAMLESS MILITARY/CIVILIAN TRANSITION: HOLDING THE OPERATIONAL FORCE TOGETHER

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**SEAMLESS MILITARY/CIVILIAN TRANSITION: HOLDING THE OPERATIONAL
FORCE TOGETHER**

by

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This paper will closely examine what is required to make a sustainable operational force as it relates to the career transition enabling a “continuum of service”. This is a continuum where both the military and employers recognize complementary skill sets that can be utilized interchangeably depending on that individual’s duty status. Many Service members have great difficulty communicating their military acquired job skills into recognizable (and coveted) skills sets for potential employers. Many foreign militaries provide a trade-based education that “sets a Soldier for life” through a Meister (master)/artisan skill program that is readily accepted by industry. Programs such as the Army Apprenticeship Program attempted to do just this in conjunction with the United States Government’s Department of Labor, but was discontinued a decade ago. The purpose of this paper is to determine best practices across numerous militaries/services, and correlate them with employer expectations. Key and critical to this research will be my civilian experience as a “headhunter” in industry, coupled with my experience working with the Army Reserve’s “Employer Partnership Initiative”.

SEAMLESS MILITARY/CIVILIAN TRANSITION: HOLDING THE OPERATIONAL FORCE TOGETHER

“Join the Army, and at least you will learn a trade”

—Unknown parent of a future Soldier

Background

The operationalization of the Reserve Components in the wake of the Long War caused the Department of Defense (DOD), and the U.S. Government (USG) as a whole, to relook governing policies that were borne of a different era, that of the Cold War. The Reserve Components long abandoned the “one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer” mantra immediately after the attacks on September 11th, 2001. The new paradigm is serving as a Reserve Component Soldier in a period of persistent conflict, serving both inactive duty periods at home while maintaining a semblance of a civilian career and deploying on Federal Active Duty orders according to the Army’s Force Generation model. The model is on a cycle with a target of one year deployment away from their civilian employment, followed by a four-year reset period, re-integrating into their civilian employment.

The purpose of this paper is to expand upon the recommendations of the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves (CNGR) related to credentialing, specific to the U.S. Army Reserve, enabling on- and off-ramping in the technical trades (specifically engineering), creating skill-rich Army Reserve Soldiers who are coveted by perspective employers, while continuing to gain skills required for their nation’s defense. The author will utilize the Army’s engineer regiment as a representative case of what has thus far occurred to achieve conditions that enable seamless transitions of highly qualified Soldiers who can succeed both in an out of uniform. The author will also make

recommendations based on existing programs that may best set those conditions required for seamless transitions along the continuum of service.

Policy

As the Army Reserve moves towards an operational force, an implied policy of continuum of service was undertaken by DOD in the past few years. The most remarkable part of this “policy” is that it is nowhere to be found in either DOD’s published National Defense Strategy in June of 2008 or its Quadrennial Defense Review Report (February 2010). The first mention of continuum of service is in the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves (CNGR), (January 31, 2008). Though these were only recommendations, the Services, particularly the Army Reserve, took it to heart and implemented initiatives. Most striking in the CNGR is the following statement:

The phrase “continuum of service” appears frequently in testimony and documents, but with little explicit description of what would actually constitute such a continuum.¹

Throughout the CNGR, the continuum of service portion defines recommendations that are primarily geared towards a transformation of legacy personnel systems, no longer valid in an operational Reserve component world. Only a small portion is dedicated to what is the heart of an operational Reserve Component, specifically the ability to move between components and duty statuses:

Key components of this strategy must include an integrated total force that provides opportunities for those who choose a civilian career, as well as ease of transition between differing service commitments... and maximum use at all

levels of the skills and abilities acquired from civilian experience. Congress must support this strategy with changes to statute when required.²

The most critical, and overlooked, portion of the CNGR is the ability for Soldiers to attain recognizable credentials that enable not only quickly attaining employment in technical trades that do not necessarily require a college degree, but also the ability to continue to develop those skills throughout a career that may include on- and off-ramps from military service coupled with a civilian career.

Building Great Engineers

The U.S. Army Engineer School (USAES) at Fort Leonard Wood, MO recognized that the role of the engineer in the greater Army was that of a *profession*. During the annual regimental conference of 2007, known as ENFORCE, the school presented what would be known as the strategic direction for the regiment, “Building Great Engineers” (BGE). The strategy, developed along the framework of the Chief of Engineers, Lieutenant General Robert Van Antwerp, moved along multiple lines of effort. During that conference in 2007, visiting U.S. Army War College (USAWC) professor, Dr. Don Snyder, additionally presented on what constitutes a *profession*, and its relevance to the regiment. A similar presentation was provided by Dr. Snyder in Bliss Hall at the U.S. Army War College during Academic Year 2011 which referenced that same presentation and the emphasis that the engineer regiment places on professionalism.

The BGE campaign has continued refinement since 2007 and was briefed at the 2010 ENFORCE conference as part of the Engineer Regimental Campaign plan, with the BGE framework intertwined in its execution. Although the regimental framework is based on five lines of effort (LOE): (1) Train Engineer Warriors, (2) Develop Engineer Leaders, (3) Expand the Engineer Team, (4) Develop Engineer Capabilities for Full

Spectrum Operations, and (5) Enhance Sense of Regiment, most prescient to the argument for credentialing can be found under LOE 2, Develop Engineer Leaders, and the subtask 2.3 Professional Certifications.³ In order to fully comprehend the amount of emphasis that the USAES places on credentialing, serving as a role model for the Army and DOD as a whole, we need to go back to its roots to see how the seeds of the past provide insights into how the continuum of service may be achieved from an in-service perspective.

The Army Apprenticeship Program

The Army Apprenticeship Program (AAP) was a whole-of-government program that was executed in the active Army from 1975 until its discontinuation in October of 1997. The AAP allowed Soldiers to work in their military occupational specialty (MOS), such as an electrician or plumber, and during their service (over 8000 hours as documented by the Soldier, their supervisor, and the Army Education Center)⁴, they competed towards a journeyman certificate granted by the Department of Labor.⁵ What is most remarkable about this program is that it was interagency and included representation from civilian industry, which are exactly the conditions that are required today in order to realize the continuum of service.

The first Army service school to register a formal apprenticeship with the Department of Labor was the United States Army Engineer School at Fort Belvoir, VA on August 18, 1975.⁶ This in-service program best prepared those who entered the program to ease their transition to the civilian workforce at a time when the all-volunteer Army was new, and many different incentives were attempted in order to attract America's youth into the service of their Nation. A surprising opposition to the program developed due to the perception of the unionization of the Army as a byproduct of the

AAP. The objection was dispelled by Public Affairs guidance released in reaction to the perception, in that Soldiers were not required to join any union or professional association as a prerequisite for enrollment in the Army Apprenticeship Program.⁷ The unionization perception bears consideration though as new programs are contemplated in order to set conditions for the credentialing required for the continuum of service.

The concept of the engineer profession has its roots during the time of the birth of the AAP, and some of that spirit is still evident in the BGE program of today.

Unfortunately the program was discontinued due to the following reasons:

- Department of Labor documentation required was too labor intensive.
- Program was “documented time-on-task based” not competency based; employers/unions wanted proof of job skills.
- The program had questionable acceptance by civilian employers.
- Because no guarantee could be given to Soldiers that they would be assigned to jobs enabling them to complete their apprenticeship programs.⁸

United States Military Apprenticeship Program

The United States Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP) is a program that no doubt was borne from the failure of the AAP. The requirements for electrician and plumber in this program are a direct 1:1 comparison and are 8,000 hours in duration. The significant differences are that the USMAP only yields a certificate of completion vice a journeyman certification; however, it is issued by the Department of Labor and is nationally recognized⁹ according to Raymond M. Jefferson, Assistant Secretary of Labor. This in-service program should remove the employer’s concerns about

precertification as a journeyman and provides a bona-fide level of competency. Much like the AAP, where the Soldier could only enroll in either his primary or secondary MOS, for the USMAP, a candidate has to be in a specific rating in order to apply for the program.¹⁰

This is not an Army program, but rather is for active duty Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Navy personnel. This could be simply adopted by the Army and potentially the Army Reserve. The reason the Army Reserve is mentioned is that under an operational Army Reserve, the amount of active duty service accrued during multiple mobilizations have made many traditional Army Reserve Soldiers appear very similar to their active component counterparts, and does warrant closer analysis.

In the era of jointness and the potential for decreased future budgets across the services, it is not impossible to imagine the possibility of the Army also adopting this program in order to continue along the road to continuum of service through credentialing. Through research, the Navy and Army are already collaborating in the area of credentialing. The Army has been operating the Army COOL (Credentialing Opportunities Online) website since April 15, 2002. The Navy entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the Army and launched the Navy COOL website in the spring of 2006 as an indication of propensity to collaborate with the Army.¹¹

Army COOL (Credentialing Opportunities Online) Program

The Army COOL program started on April 15, 2002 serving as a replacement program for the AAP which was cancelled in October of 1997. The distinct difference between AAP and COOL was the burden of proof. All work was borne by the apprentice candidate and tended more towards not what the Soldier intrinsically has attained while in-service, but rather what the Soldier has yet to accomplish, which

further complicates a smooth and rapid transition between the military and civilian industry. The website serves merely as a portal for candidates to explore their career options but they are all external to DOD.

The major risk in the Army COOL program is the Soldier is on their own, and there is no institutional responsibility from either of DOD (aside from database management) and the Soldier now having to convince his or her chain of command as to the relevancy of the potential credentialing program. For basic electricians, the only option would be to go through their own state and attempt to meet those state requirements. The risk is high that Soldiers will not be able to accomplish this without any form of command emphasis.

British Army

The Royal Engineers of the British Army are directly tied into civilian certification leading to a national vocational qualification. The Army guides its Soldiers through their own Center for Professional Development (CPD). Candidates can undertake either of a level 2 (basic) or Level 3 (advanced) apprenticeship through a combination of military work experience, schooling, and testing.¹² What makes this program such an attractive option, at least idealistically, is that it is a national system representing a whole-of-government approach; however, the challenge to this program from an American perspective is that the federalism inherent in the USG system places most trade credentialing at the state level. In order for this to be implemented, a nationalization of credentialing and potentially industries would need to occur, both of which are highly unlikely.

From the perspective of profession, as mentioned in the USAES's BGE program, this program displays an inherent professionalism in the British Armed forces, as the

military displays a partnership with the Soldier throughout life-long learning and certification and serves as a model for what continuum of service demands, as it climbs a ladder of professional certification far and above the basic level into management positions later in the candidate's career.

Dutch Army

The Dutch Army made a radical change when it moved from a conscript army to an all-volunteer force in 1994. They further modified their enlistment contractual structure in 2006, and there are now three levels of enlistment, each of which provides unique opportunities for technical certification. The level 1 Soldier (usually a three-year enlistment) receives the opportunity to study for a civilian vocational certificate (with expenses paid by the Dutch Army), and the Soldier even receives a half day per week as leave in order to study. Upon the end of the first enlistment, those Soldiers selected for continuation (the Dutch Army enacted an "up or out" system in 2006) receive a second contract, known as level 2, and with that, the opportunity for additional schooling. Leadership within the Dutch Army saw benefits in their Soldiers learning artisan skills such as plumbing, carpentry, or electrical work and fostered that continuing education. It is a mindset that the U.S. Army perhaps should also consider.

A level 3 contract is considered a lifetime contract with the Army, as long as the Soldier is 32 years of age or younger for contract eligibility. The Soldier is then offered further opportunities for vocational education. With each opportunity, the course of study may be offered within the Army's schooling system or at civilian institutions within current Army financial regulations.

One point regarding the Dutch Army is totally foreign to most Americans. There is compulsory education in the Netherlands until the age of 18. Those who are not

college-bound are offered the opportunity to start their secondary education in the same trade school (Ministry of Defence Civilian Training Center) attended by members of the Army. Though they are not yet in the Army, they will spend one week every three weeks in an internship with the Army for the entire time they are in the program of study until they graduate. Upon graduation, and successful completion of physical fitness requirements, they are offered an enlistment in the Dutch Army, but with a much reduced schooling requirement prior to their first posting, and a realization of cost savings as an institution.¹³

The take-aways from this methodology are many. The simple thought should be, does the continuum of service start before enlistment? And if so, is that something that American society could accept? The chain of command emphasis on schooling is also extremely appealing. It should further be noted that the Dutch Army is unionized, though union adoption in DOD is highly unlikely.

Employer Partnership Office

The Army Reserve is very forward thinking in how it engages employers and simultaneously retains Soldiers. The Army Reserve implemented the Army Force Generation Model for the Army Reserve in 2005. The goal of the model was to provide predictability and stability to both Army Reserve Soldiers and their employers as to when they may be expected to deploy in the service of their nation. This was a far cry from the earlier strategic Army Reserve of the pre-9-11 generation, where one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer were the rule. This was the direct result of the operationalization of the Army Reserve. The Chief, Army Reserve (CAR), Lieutenant General Jack C. Stultz needed to also find a way to satisfy the needs of the three legged stool, namely the Soldier, the employer, and the family.

At the direction of the CAR, the Employer Partnership Initiative (EPI) was formed in April of 2008. The goal was to tie in Army Reserve Soldiers with career opportunities, while simultaneously offering employers prescreened candidates who were highly skilled, motivated, drug-free, and self-starters, as well as provide a sound quality of life for families. The EPI started with a single agreement with Innova Healthcare for hiring of radiology technicians, where the CAR noted that they do the same job both in the Army and in industry, for him, it was a “win-win situation”.¹⁴ The intent of the program was to provide access to employers from the pool of potentially suitable candidates, and the Soldier would be guaranteed the potential of at least an interview with that employer. Since that time, numerous employers have signed agreements with the program. As a battalion commander, the author attended numerous signings of joint EPI agreements, and there is a genuine interest on the part of employers to partner with the military as a whole. The success of the program is such that EPI transformed into the Employer Partnership Office in 2010 as part of the greater Employer Partnership of the Armed Forces (EPAF), consisting of all branches of the armed forces, which is a further tendency as a joint approach to the problem. The EPAF now boasts over 1000 employer partners, with over 10,000 Soldiers, families, and veterans being linked to over 500,000 job offerings.¹⁵

The concept of credentialing is the next phase of the EPAF, but it is not yet a main theme. Whereas the potential for a job interview is a positive, a Soldier possessing verifiable credentials that are readily recognized by industry would indicate a stronger candidacy for a position. Proper credentials, as those afforded by the now-

defunct AAP and the current USMAP, would definitely lead to a smoother transition along the continuum of service.

Helmets to Hardhats

In January 2003, the Helmets to Hardhats (H2H) program was launched as a way to ease transition for separating servicemembers into the construction trades. The H2H program is administered by the Center for Military Recruitment, Assessment and Veterans Employment and is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization, receiving (\$5.4 million in funding from DOD in 2007).¹⁶ The program, also a web portal, links candidates with over 15 trade unions (including the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America), and 11 separate association and corporations (including the Finishing Contractors Association). The program is geared towards the separating servicemember, but also advertizes eligibility for members of the Reserve Components to include the Army Reserve. Candidates are able to enter an apprenticeship program for construction trades, coupled with the Post-9-11GI Bill benefits.

There is great benefit in this program in moving toward a continuum of service, especially as this is an established program, with standing ties between DOD and industry. A caveat here is that although the research of this paper only includes the construction trades, it should be realized that H2H is not a program that will encompass a multitude of other military specialties and career fields, and should only be seen as viable for this small population, and not for the much larger military audience. Also mentioned in the H2H program is the potential that military experience will count towards journeyman status, or be classified as a journeyman immediately.¹⁷ Here too is where in-service credentialing could be a definite asset to the candidate. The credentialing, coupled with verifiable military experience, would most likely provide the

optimum candidacy for the next employment opportunity. Most often, the competitive edge lies in the quality of the transition program offered to the separating servicemember, and the fidelity of the documentation provided to the potential employer.

Army Career and Alumni Program

Based on service as an executive recruiter in the author's civilian career prior to reentry on active duty, the single greatest asset that brings candidates in contact with great employment opportunities is their attitudes about their careers, and what they are willing to do to best portray themselves as the member of a team. The single document that encompasses this passion is the resume. The Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP), established in 1992, was designed to handle the massive transition of Soldiers leaving the Army as a result of the post-Desert Storm drawdown. The program started with simple interviewing tips, how to write a good resume, and how to use what was then a novelty, the personal computer. As one of the first graduates of the program in U.S. Army Europe in Germany in February 1992, the author sees that the program has progressed greatly since that time. The major innovations that assisted in this transformation was the computer and the use of web-based databases in order to both store and retrieve data.

The ACAP of today is a robust program requiring at least 40 hours, providing classes, workshops, and one-on-one counseling on topics ranging from those in the legacy program, as well as enhanced emphasis on veterans benefits, to include counseling for post-traumatic stress and mild traumatic brain injury. Most notable are the transition assistance workshops that are conducted by Department of Labor sponsored facilitators. The emphasis on wounded warriors is also impressive as there

are programs directly tied to both the Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP) and the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.¹⁸ The final service which is enormously important in bringing the candidate in contact with the employer is the web-based search services. The ACAP program is one tool that no doubt assists the Soldier along the continuum of service; however, not all candidates are best positioned for the job market, and the challenge is documentation.

Documentation

While the resume may be appropriate for professional or white collar professions, many times those in the trades are reliant on a personal interview and the provision of some form of credentialing. The biggest challenge that employers encounter is deciphering the Soldier's actual experience. Military jargon, such as an MOS of 12W (Carpentry Masonry Specialist), is very cumbersome. Hiring managers need to compare apples to apples, know where they can save money on training by virtue of having a trained candidate upon hiring, and know how that candidate developed throughout his career.

Each separating servicemember receives a number of documents incident to their military service to include DOD Form 214, which gives a legal characterization of their military service (honorable or other than honorable), the dates in which they served, and the schooling and awards they received during that period of active duty. The problem is that most of the information is in cryptic military jargon, understandable only by a seasoned military veteran and not a civilian human resources generalist.

The major document that is provided to the servicemember, the Verification of Military Experience and Training (VMET), or Department of Defense Form 2586, provides a wealth of knowledge to the perspective employer. The challenge is that the

information is Service specific, and the fidelity of the information provided may vary with each of the Services. The Army provides a VMET to all Soldiers at any time during their career upon web-request. The VMET is fed from the Army Training Requirements Reporting System (ATRRS) which is the Army's database of record for all formal schooling. It does display all schools attended, to include credit recommendations from the American Council on Education on equivalent college credits for certain schools. What it does not include is the crux of the argument of this paper and that is the documentation of work experience gained by the individual over a career.¹⁹ The U.S. Air Force (USAF) not only provides all training conducted through formal schooling, the USAF version of the VMET also includes not only all service rendered by the member via duty position, to include an "English-language" description of the duties performed, it also includes related civilian occupations and relevant Department of Transportation codes. This is precisely what the employer needs in order to compare apples to apples. Even more so, in the absence of a quantifiable credential, the employer can at least construct along a specific competency how long the candidate has worked in a specialty and how much training may be need if the candidate is hired. This is truly a great asset in the absence of the credential, and still moves along the continuum of service, albeit not on the optimal path.

National Military Organizations

Numerous private organizations provide either services or influence, through lobbying, to the servicemembers of the armed forces such as the Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA) or the Reserve Officers Association (ROA). For the engineer regiment, there are two noteworthy organizations that may potentially assist along the continuum of service.

The Army Engineer Association (AEA) is an organization that serves the engineer regiment as a nonprofit organization providing a sense of regiment to its membership. They provide regimental recognition programs such as the de Fleury medal for engineering excellence. They also provide scholarships to their members and support to the fallen and wounded.²⁰ They provide most importantly a bona fide connection with industry which not only allows them the ability to compete for USG contracts, but also provides opportunities for many to work within their firms upon separation. Unfortunately, most of this is geared towards engineer commissioned officers, specifically degreed and certified engineers, and professional engineers (PEs). When the Executive Director of the AEA was asked if the AEA provided any type of service to support the credentialing of enlisted Soldiers in the technical trades, he replied that he knew of no existing program within the AEA that provided that type of service, in the absence of an Army in-service credentialing program.²¹ This shortfall in services is more of a business concern for the AEA, but it should be recognized that advocacy should be provided to all ranks and specialties if we are to accomplish the continuum of service for all.

The Society of American Military Engineers (SAME) is similar to the AEA. However, it tends more on the technical side and provides numerous technical training workshops and meeting opportunities for its members to further engineering.²² The author posed the similar question to a member of the SAME staff regarding fostering the credentialing of enlisted members. SAME entered into a memorandum of agreement with the University of North Dakota, unfortunately it is predominantly for those pursuing a degree at the baccalaureate level and not for tradesmen.²³ Here, too, is a missed

opportunity from a business model perspective, but again from a continuum of service perspective, every possible opportunity for interconnectivity with industry, coupled with career opportunities for all is the goal.

Conclusion

This paper dealt with the many facets that enable the continuum of service to become a reality, specifically with regards to an operational Army Reserve as well as the Army as a whole. Key areas of discussion are all key components required for enabling a continuum of service including:

- In-service credentialing;
- Engineer regimental emphasis on professional competence and development;
- Post-service credentialing;
- Transition services; and
- Documentation.

A key corollary for consideration in further research might be what considerations from a service perspective need to be defined for those who separate, and after civilian work experience, or in the case of the U.S. Navy's pilot sabbatical program, how are their civilian acquired skills then translated into a prior-service enlistment at a later time.

Some specific recommendations as a result of this research might warrant further consideration as we move forward, and are as follows:

- The Army should immediately consider collaboration with the U.S. Navy towards adaption of the USMAP so that in-service credentialing can again be a key part of the Soldier's career, and set conditions for future military and

civilian success. The Navy's adoption of the Army COOL program is an indicator that the potential for collaboration is high.

- Continue the Army COOL program (based on performance). However, it should explore folding USMAP into it and exploring additional opportunities for in-service credentialing that partners not only employers with DOD, but more importantly it partners the Soldier with his or her chain of command, so that appropriate emphasis is given to their completion of a given apprenticeship.
- The Army should relook its inputs to the VMET (DD Form 2586) so that not only are military schools represented (via ATRRS), but also the work experience as compared to existing civilian standards such as those in the Department of Transportation.
- Leaders at all levels should rededicate themselves to the value of education for those under their charge, be it those who are either of college-, or trade-bound.
- Foreign militaries, which operate under much smaller budgets, may provide numerous ideas for the Department of Defense to exploit as we potentially move into a new era of budget constraint.
- Any organization that furthers the connection between Soldiers and the nation (be it potential employers, business partners, or the populace at large) serves a vital role in the defense of the Nation. These programs should be expanded where possible, and indicative of the fact that the U.S. Army is America's

Army, and the Army's connection with the people is where it derives its strength.

Initial construction of the road towards a continuum of service was paved long ago. Through this body of work, it is apparent that the subbase of the roadway is solid and well compacted to sustain the forces of future challenge. The challenge for all strategic leaders is, can we still maintain our work on the completion of this roadway while maintaining active engagement in two wars, serving as one of the world's most powerful nations. From the passion the author sees not only in the eyes of our bravest sons and daughters who are committed to the nation's defense, and to the parents and grandparents who do want their treasured offspring to learn a trade, we owe them nothing less.

Endnotes

¹ Final Report to the Secretary of Defense, Commission on the National Guard and the Reserves (Arnold L. Punaro Chairman), Arlington, VA, January 31, 2008, 16.

² Ibid., 127

³ BG Bryan Watson, "U.S. Army Engineer Campaign Plan – Achieving a Vision", Fort Leonard Wood, MO, U.S. Army Engineer School (accessed November 7, 2010).

⁴ U.S. Department of the Army, The U.S. Army Engineer School Apprenticeship Program for the Trade of Electrician, Department of the Army Pamphlet 621-86 (Washington DC: September 27, 1977), A-2.

⁵ U.S. Department of the Army, The U.S. Army Engineer School Apprenticeship Program for the Trade of Electrician, Department of the Army Pamphlet 621-86 (Washington DC: September 27, 1977), 1-2.

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