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INFORMATION PAPER

DAMH-RAS

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SUBJECT: Effects of Previous Drawdowns on the NCO Corps

1. Purpose: To provide information on the effects of drawdowns on the Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) corps after World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars.

2. Facts.

a. Customarily, at the end of a war Congress has cut defense forces to the bone. The late nineteenth century and the 1930s are particularly painful examples. Through the post-World War I era, the NCO corps suffered from special problems: the nation dismissed its wartime skills as useless; some of its most experienced members left or were forced out of the service; its status was lowered; and its pay was cut. In addition to being ignored during peacetime, after World War II and the Korean War the NCO corps became the repository for excess officers.

b. Before World War II there existed a hard core of "noncoms." Turnover in personnel was light. Weapons, tactics, and unit organization changed slowly. Men had time to learn their jobs well. The unit commander had time to select the proper men to serve as noncommissioned officers and to train them to do the job. The job requirements were neither technically complex nor demanding of interpersonal skills: hard work, stamina, attention to detail, a strong sense of duty and discipline, at least average intelligence, and the ability to control and command the respect of men who like themselves were rough and untutored. Noncommissioned officers learned by the on-the-job-training (OJT) method because they had time and because there were few opportunities for formal training.

c. NCO TRAINING AND EDUCATION: NCO training and education began receiving serious attention following the World War II drawdown. Although NCO OJT prevailed through World War II, the decisive change came after the war as the Army took up its occupation duties in Germany and Japan and prepared to face the challenges of the Cold War. The Army Staff decided to develop service-wide standards for NCO training in peacetime because well-trained NCOs were still needed and few possessed the skills required for postwar duties. The Army's answer was the NCO academy system. One seasoned NCO recalled that "the thought of an NCO learning his job without first doing it wrong and getting chewed out excited the NCOs." Beginning in 1947 and continuing throughout the 1950s, a small number of NCO academies emerged, the first being the Constabulary Academy founded at Sonthofen, Germany. Probably the best known was the Seventh Army NCO Academy in Munich. Although promising, the new schools had shortcomings: weak guidance from above resulted in a lack of uniformity in selection procedures, subject matter, quality of instruction, and length of courses. Moreover,

most NCOs never attended an academy; for them, instruction continued to mean traditional OJT.

d. An important adjunct of the Army's postwar education and training reforms centered on the Career Guidance Plan. Issued in January 1948, the plan intended to establish "an orderly and systematic plan of assignment, training, and promotion" for enlisted soldiers. The concept was to set standards and grades to fill mission essential Army requirements; to devise a system to train soldiers to qualify for the positions; and to create responsive personnel procedures. Unfortunately, this ambitious plan was shortlived and suspended due to a lack of funding. The plan's suspension also caused the Army to close its first postwar NCO academy. The demands for resources during the Korean War effectively ended the program.

e. The Korean War revealed an urgent need for more and better trained small unit leaders. During the drawdown the Army Staff began recognizing deficiencies in a system that relied on ad hoc courses and OJT to produce NCOs prepared for leadership in a nuclear age. The staff took no immediate steps, however, to reform NCO education and training further.

f. Vietnam brought NCO education and training to the point of crisis. Tactical operations depended upon small unit leaders even more than in Korea. As the American role grew, combat losses, the limitations of the 12-month tour in Vietnam, and the 25-month stabilized tour in the rotation base, plus normal separations and retirements, led to a severe NCO shortage. Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson created the Noncommissioned Officers Candidate Courses (NCOCC) in 1967 to train NCOs for the combat arms. Although these "shake and bake" NCOs generally performed well, the Army leadership concluded that the NCOCC were not a sound foundation upon which to base long-term training. General Donn A. Starry recalled that "we always had inexperienced sergeants and lieutenants--the blind leading the blind. If you looked at those outfits and compared them to others where the NCOs were mature and experienced, the difference was just striking." The rapid "shake and bake" advancement of NCOs has been criticized for diluting the overall professionalism of the NCO corps. But these "shake and bake" NCOs were the first NCOs ever to receive formalized combat leadership training. NCO training needed permanent upgrading and reform.

g. In 1971, after the Army discovered that only five percent of NCOs were receiving formal training, the Army established the Noncommissioned Officers Educational System (NCOES) to increase the professional quality of the NCO corps; provide enlisted personnel with opportunities for progressive, continuing professional development; enhance career attractiveness; and provide the Army with trained and dedicated NCOs to fill permanent positions of increased responsibility. During the drawdown from the Vietnam War, the NCOES began to mature, giving NCOs for the

first time a formal, standardized system that educated enlisted men and women in step with grade progression.

h. NCO PEACETIME TREATMENT: The prestige of the NCO Corps suffered in the drawdown following World War II. The Army underwent a 75 percent reduction in just two years. To deal with a huge surplus of commissioned officers who wished to remain on active duty, the Army allowed thousands of these men to fill the top three NCO grades. That step not only made these grades heavily overstrength but also ensured that NCOs below the level of master sergeant would be frozen in place for a long time. When the Army's postwar overall strength reached its low point in mid-1948, NCO ranks were bursting at the seams. Training, discipline, and morale suffered as the Army experienced a period of neglect. Neither commissioned officers nor the NCO corps were prepared for the Korean War.

i. In the Korean War drawdown, the Army made the same mistake of inflating the NCO corps with surplus commissioned officers as it did after World War II. During fiscal year 1955, more than 5,000 reserve officers were still serving on extended active duty, most of them having been recalled to active duty during Korea but passed over for promotion to captain, major, or lieutenant colonel. The Army offered those whose service began before 22 March 1948 automatic appointments as master sergeants, and those with later entry dates were offered NCO appointments at the next lower grade. This policy again glutted the top enlisted ranks and lowered morale in the junior NCO ranks. By early 1958, at a time when the Army needed young technicians and specialists, there were more master sergeants and sergeants first class than at the height of World War II.

j. During the Vietnam War drawdown, the Army did not repeat the mistake of inflating the NCO corps with surplus commissioned officers. At the end of the war, instead of flooding NCO ranks with officers who were neither outstanding small unit leaders nor specialists, the Army sought to attract and retain a truly professional NCO corps by guaranteeing that the role and dignity of the NCO in peacetime would not be diminished. The establishment of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army during the war attested to the Army's desire to elevate the status and morale of the NCO corps and provide greater recognition for the enlisted ranks.

k. Despite the Army's efforts to guarantee the role and dignity of the NCO corps, NCO authority, responsibility, and prestige declined during the Vietnam drawdown. The rapid promotion of NCOs during previous wars and the cumulative effect of the Vietnam experience combined to weaken seriously the bond of mutual trust and confidence between many NCOs and officers. A 1970 Army War College study examining Army leadership found that too many commanders at all levels looked upward to please superiors rather than downward to fulfill the legitimate needs of subordinates. The study also cited an all-pervasive "zero-defects" approach to command by most

commissioned officers as a key factor in undermining mutual trust and respect in the command structure. Zero defects and micromanagement diluted authority and ability at every level of responsibility. One officer noted that this led "to a curious situation in many units in which the officer does NCO work, the NCO does soldier work, and the soldier does as he pleases." He also added that "too many NCOs are used as 'gophers,' or they are not used at all." A 1984 Army Science Board Report on leading and manning the future Army echoed the findings of the earlier study. The report recognized that "peacetime training environments must leave room for error and learning by experience or association. A 'zero defects' Army, as it is now perceived by some, does not allow for the opportunity for comprehensive training which develops the leadership qualities so essential to the future battlefield."

I. NCO QUALITY-OF-LIFE ISSUES: The World War II drawdown signalled the beginning of a significant demographic change in the NCO corps. Before World War II, many NCOs lived for the most part in the barracks and were available to take care of their men's basic needs and maintain order and discipline seven days a week. By 1950, however, a large percentage of the Army's senior NCOs were married and no longer lived in barracks with their men. Career-minded NCOs with families started becoming more concerned with quality-of-life issues.

m. During the Vietnam drawdown, the Army's leadership recognized that quality-of-life issues would play an increasing role in attracting and retaining a professional NCO corps in an all-volunteer Army. The post-Vietnam, all-volunteer Army, underwent a significant transformation into a force composed largely of married soldiers. For the first time in nearly two hundred years, more than half of all enlisted men on active duty were married. With this demographic change, many mid-level NCOs left the barracks. Quality of life issues, such as housing, pay, and benefits, took on added importance to a greater proportion of career-minded NCOs with families than ever before. Although, the Army's leaders recognized the importance of quality-of-life issues as the demography of the force changed, they did not have adequate funding to address these issue during the drawdown. As a result, the morale of the NCO corps suffered.

n. During the Vietnam drawdown, the Army also faced declining morale and, because of the difficulties of manning an all-volunteer Army, a lowering of recruiting standards. A number of NCOs left the Army for more lucrative employment in the civilian sector or left because they were dissatisfied with their duties as soldiers. In 1981, one observer of this trend noted that "the middle grade NCOs have had to endure slower promotions than did their predecessors; watch helplessly an erosion of benefits; accept a cost of living increase that has exceeded pay rates, and most critically, endure reduction of a meaningful mission." To add to the disappointment, many junior specialists and NCOs were thrust into assuming duties of more senior NCOs (who were lacking in numbers), and accepted challenges that resulted in early exhaustion. This caused many hard-working, effective NCOs to envision years of more

work ahead while facing fewer reasons for continuing the strenuous pace. Also, as a result of lowered enlistment standards to support a voluntary Army, junior NCOs became increasingly frustrated teaching lower-quality recruits. These junior NCOs found themselves spending too much time on motivation and discipline matters, at the expense of mission training.

o. As the 1970s began, the reduction of the Army from Vietnam's peak of 1.5 million men and women to about 775,000 and the emergence of the all-volunteer force caused the Army Staff to reconsider its piecemeal personnel management programs. Policies governing promotion, MOS classification, and testing and evaluation all affected a soldier's career pattern, morale, and likelihood of staying in the Army. Because the various programs were separate and sometimes contradictory in their effect, some soldiers became confused and disheartened by the lack of clear direction in their careers. Army Chief of Staff General Creighton W. Abrams directed a review to address the problem. In 1973 the Military Personnel Center and the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) took the lead in initiating far-ranging studies.

p. The result was the Enlisted Personnel Management System (EPMS), implemented in 1975. It was designed to provide clear patterns of career development and promotion potential, whether a soldier served three years or thirty. The EPMS eliminated dead-end military occupational specialties (MOS), those in which a soldier could progress only to sergeant or staff sergeant. The Staff intended the new system to eradicate promotion bottlenecks and to provide a fair opportunity for advancement to all career-motivated soldiers along the most direct route from E-1 to E-9 by centralizing promotions. NCO education was also affected. The NCOES was one of the earliest programs to be taken over, integrated, and expanded. Once EPMS was adopted, the NCO corps had a formal, service-wide system of professional career development similar to that of commissioned officers.

q. ASSESSMENT: Despite the pervasive effects of the drawdowns following World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, the collective reforms instituted during these periods of retrenchment led to significant improvements in the NCO corps. Progressive reforms made in NCO peacetime treatment, training and education, and personnel management established the foundations for centralizing and standardizing NCO professional development and raising the morale and status of the NCO corps. While the advances made from OJT to the NCOES laid the cornerstone of a high-quality, professional NCO corps for the future, the advances made in NCO treatment in peacetime and personnel management were no less important in helping establish improved foundations for recruitment and retention of the NCO corps. During the precipitous Vietnam drawdown of 1973-75, the failure of the Army leadership to eradicate the zero defects mentality, maintain higher recruiting standards, and adequately fund quality-of-life programs harkened back to the ill-fated Career Guidance Plan of 1948 and threatened to diminish NCO status again. This time, however, the

Army recognized how critical the loss of experienced NCOs was to its daily operations and by supporting NCO education and training initiatives with people and resources during the 1970s and 1980s was able to develop the professional NCO of today.

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