

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**TRANSFORMATION OF THE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER EDUCATION  
SYSTEM: LEVERAGING EDUCATION TO IMPROVE NONCOMMISSIONED  
OFFICER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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## ABSTRACT

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If the Army is going to be an adaptable and innovative force, with soldiers skilled in their specific Military Occupational Specialty, proficient in their warrior skills, and have language and cultural knowledge, the Army's noncommissioned officer professional development policies must change. This essay addresses changes needed in the noncommissioned officer's formal education and describes ways to better integrate it into career progression. The basic premise is to develop an education and certification program for noncommissioned officers that enables a noncommissioned officer to get civilian college credit for all of their military schooling, and awards a bachelors degree and appropriate civilian licensure or credentials upon completion of the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course. By meshing the civilian education with career progression, the Army not only improves the overall capability of individual noncommissioned officers, but uses education as an incentive to remain in the service. This recommendation requires minimal additional resources because it better utilizes existing programs such as eArmyU and tuition assistance, and integrates them with recruiting and retention programs.



## TRANSFORMATION OF THE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER EDUCATION SYSTEM: LEVERAGING EDUCATION TO IMPROVE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Army is transforming. It is becoming lighter and more lethal. Over the past few years the operational Army has become more modular, more expeditionary, and a more campaign quality force. The Army wants leaders at all levels to be adaptive and innovative. The concept of the Army Force Generation Cycle was initiated to meet the needs of an Army in continuous operations<sup>1</sup> - for an Army at War. As transformation of the operational Army becomes a reality, it is now time to re-look the enlisted soldier's career development. Specifically, how can the Army leverage education with noncommissioned officer professional development – from recruitment to retirement? This re-look is needed to achieve better integration and synchronization with the ultimate goal of developing a more professional Noncommissioned Officer Corps.

This essay examines the question: How does the Army leverage education to improve noncommissioned officer professional development to achieve a better integrated and better synchronized career development program for noncommissioned officers? The current model for retention of enlisted soldiers is outdated. Roughly 20% of the enlisted ranks leave the Army each year.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, only 15% of all enlisted soldiers serve 20 years in the military compared to 47% of officers.<sup>3</sup> This turnover rate is unacceptable in the medium and high skill jobs held by much of the military. If the Army is going to be an adaptable and innovative force, with soldiers skilled in their specific Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), proficient in their warrior skills, and have language and cultural knowledge, the Army's noncommissioned officer professional development policies need to change.

This essay addresses one aspect of the noncommissioned officer development system that needs to change - formal education and ways to better integrate it into the noncommissioned officer career progression. This paper starts by analyzing the background of the current recruitment and retention system. This is followed by a description of lifelong learning, the current Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES), and the current civilian educational opportunities offered to soldiers. Next, this paper analyzes the recent initiative by the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth to transform the Noncommissioned Officer Education System. In addition, it examines the relationship between the requirements of the operational Army and the institutional education system. This includes requirements driven by joint interoperability and homeland security / homeland defense. Finally, this paper makes recommendations to better integrate and synchronize an enlisted soldier's institutional

education with career development. These changes directly impact the career progression of soldiers and their relevance and competence on the battlefield. Leveraging education provides soldiers with the technical background to operate more effectively in the current operational environment with the focus on quality over quantity. This is a strategic issue because it has broad impact across the military in recruitment and retention of soldiers. It also changes existing paradigms, and reverses trends within the Army to decrease the branch specific training.

### Background

The activation of the all-volunteer force ushered in a major restructuring of the NCOES and career development structure. The time has come for the Army to move beyond the traditional structure based on an expected high turnover rate within the first five years of service and move to a structure that recognizes the need for highly experienced and highly trained soldiers. The Army's current noncommissioned officer development model is disjointed. Recruitment and retention efforts are short sighted, branch specific institutional training is insufficient to provide soldiers the skills needed in today's environment, and civilian educational opportunities offered by the military are not synchronized with the needs of the soldier in the Army - but rather for the soldier once they leave military service. The Army is not going to get significantly larger, yet the breadth of missions continues to expand with the demands of the contemporary operating environment. The Army must leverage both its kinetic and non-kinetic capabilities. In order to do this, the Army needs to improve the quality of the soldier on the ground. This process starts at the institutional training base with the education of the noncommissioned officer.

There are currently 203 enlisted entry level MOS's in the Army.<sup>4</sup> The amount of training a soldier receives during a twenty year career varies by MOS. Thus the impact of transforming the NCOES system is directly related to the various occupational specialties. However, there are a number of broad characterizations that can be made in order to better define the challenges and identify a need to better synchronize and integrate the Army's recruiting and retention programs with the educational system. Out of the 203 entry level MOS's, less than 10% are considered unique to the Army - with no civilian equivalent career field. These MOS's are found predominantly in the combat arms branches. The remaining 90% are in the combat support and combat service support branches.<sup>5</sup> These are the mechanics that work on vehicles, aircraft, and other systems, the engineers, the medical personnel, the communications and information systems specialists, the paralegal, military police, intelligence analysts, the

finance and administrative specialist, and logisticians. These Military Occupational Specialties are technical in nature and pose a different challenge for recruitment and retention than the combat arms MOS's. They also offer a greater opportunity to leverage education in order to better synchronize recruitment and retention with career development.

Aside from their obvious "technical" nature and the fact they are found predominantly in the combat support and combat service support branches, these MOS's possess two other qualities. First, their skills relate directly to civilian professions, such as carpenters or policemen. Because of this direct relation to civilian jobs, soldiers in technical MOS's are highly marketable in the civilian work force resulting in the technical MOS's to be among the most critically short MOS's in the Army.<sup>6</sup> Second and more importantly, there are specific education and/or certification requirements to perform the civilian equivalent occupations. As an example, a civilian carpenter needs to move from apprentice, to journeymen, to master level. An electrician must be licensed which normally requires at least two years of post high school education. Likewise, police and medical specialists have a level of certification or formal education beyond high school that is required to perform in the civilian marketplace. In most of the civilian equivalent career fields there are formal education requirements if the individual wants to continue to move through the career field to positions of increased pay and responsibility.

#### Recruiting and Retention

The Department of Defense Selective Reenlistment Bonus Program (SRBP) dates back to 1974 and the creation of the All-Volunteer force. It allows the services to use financial incentives to address short term retention problems in critical military specialties or skills.<sup>7</sup> Over time the Army has failed to update or make long-term corrections to the system in order to accommodate the changing nature of the Army. Under the current system when a given Military Occupational Specialty strength level is low, the Army offers bonuses and other enticements for enlistment or reenlistment. A recent Government Accounting Officer study points out that many soldiers recruited under these conditions are often given, or choose, a particular MOS based on incentives rather than on an aptitude or desire to serve in that MOS. As a result the quality of performance and motivation of the soldier decreases.<sup>8</sup> Monetary incentives are considered short-term in nature. Conversely, education and retirement are considered long-term incentives.<sup>9</sup> This system is short sighted and over-reliant on monetary bonuses when it could better leverage educational and other long term incentives to improve retention.

The Army's over-reliance on monetary incentives needs to change in order to keep up with the current societal trends. As the middle class has grown over the past 30 years of the all-volunteer force, the population the military recruits has changed as well. Research done by Leonard Wong regarding the differences and similarities between individuals in the Generation X and the Baby Boomer generation in the commissioned officer ranks, indicate Generation Xers are more concerned about balance in their lives as well as more interested in post high school education. The Army must recognize what motivates Generation X soldiers and develop a strategy to address those motivations.<sup>10</sup> One indication of the change is in recruiting demographics and the fact the military now competes with colleges and universities for service members.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, studies show 18% of the military have some college if not a bachelor's degree compared to 49% of their civilian counterparts.<sup>12</sup> The Army needs to capitalize on this gap. If the current generation of recruits is motivated by education and military members are significantly less likely than their civilian counterparts to have some college, it makes sense for the Army to turn this shortcoming into an incentive.

Another challenge in retaining soldiers is understanding the nature of the support functions of the Army - the "tail". The Army doesn't always put priority in maintaining technical MOS's as well as it should. This is largely due to the direct link between civilian careers and technical MOS's. The tasks of these technical fields can be contracted and therefore the units comprised of technical MOS soldiers are often reduced or eliminated in favor of combat arms units. Although there is some validity to the argument technical functions can be contracted, the Army must maintain a minimum requirement to perform critical battlefield missions. Operations such as Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom indicate the Army does not have sufficient force structure in many technical fields. Currently, the most critically short MOS's are military police, medical, transportation, and engineers.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, dependence on contractor support entails some risk and often has an adverse impact on mission accomplishment. In the initial phases of Operation Iraqi Freedom, contractors were reluctant to enter Iraq until the environment was more permissive. As a result, combat support and combat service support units were over tasked, or critical missions did not occur due to lack of skilled military personnel to accomplish them.<sup>14</sup> With this in mind the senior leadership of the Army is looking at structuring the Army to sustain military operations independent of significant contract support for the initial 60-70 days of operations in non-permissive environments.<sup>15</sup> This is a good initiative but drives the question whether the military has the capacity and expertise to accomplish this?

### Lifelong Learning and the Noncommissioned Officer Education System

At the heart of the soldier development, whether it is for enlisted soldiers, warrant officers, or commissioned officers, is the concept of Lifelong Learning.

Lifelong Learning is a connected training and education process encompassing all individual learning endeavors, formal and informal, over the lifespan; encouraging learning, growth, and achievement across personal, professional, and organizational domains; enabling access and opportunity by leveraging technology, appropriate learning strategies, and supportive training and personnel policies.<sup>16</sup>

According to the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, lifelong learning will provide the framework necessary to support a modular, expeditionary Army at war and meet the training and education challenges for the Future Force. It takes traditional schoolhouse instruction and the latest methodologies in distance learning and creates a blended environment that supports the soldier regardless of location.<sup>17</sup> The above definition represents recognition by the Army of the need to better integrate and synchronize the operational experience with institutional education. This concept also drives transformation of the current NCOES.

The current Noncommissioned Officer Education System is over thirty years old and dates back to the creation of the all-volunteer force of the 1970's. Additionally, in the early 1980s the Army did away with Specialist ranks above the rank of E-4 in order to instill a higher caliber of leadership in the enlisted ranks. At the time, this was the right approach. Leadership is a vital skill for noncommissioned officers. Over time the leadership capabilities of the enlisted force have vastly improved but as a result of this shift in emphasis the technical capabilities of the enlisted ranks have declined.<sup>18</sup> Emerging technologies coupled with a limited force structure necessitates reversing this trend and improve skills through increased education.

The Army's leadership development model consists of three pillars: Institutional Training and Education, Operational Assignments, and Self-Development.<sup>19</sup> The focus of the Institutional Training and Education pillar is to provide the institutional foundation for leader development. As part of the base education, the NCOES is designed around four primary courses: Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC) which as of Oct 2005 was changed to the Warrior Leader Course,<sup>20</sup> Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course (BNCOC), Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course (ANCOC), and the Sergeants Major Course. Of the four courses only two, BNCOC and ANCOC, provide technical MOS related training. Although it varies based on MOS, the average amount of technical training an enlisted soldier receives through Initial Entry Training (IET) and NCOES is roughly twenty weeks during their career.<sup>21</sup> Twenty weeks of training over a period of twelve to sixteen years is insufficient to reach an

acceptable level of proficiency when compared with civilian certification requirements. Regrettably time allocated to technical MOS training is declining. Institutional training has been reduced over the past few years in order to get soldiers into operational units faster. The Trainee, Transient, Holders, Student (TTHS) account, the account used to track soldiers not assigned to an operational or administrative units, is constantly scrutinized by TRADOC and the Army staff to find ways to reduce the account and get soldiers back into operational units. Institutional education becomes a victim of these reductions. This has created an environment where institutional training is viewed negatively and has resulted in reduced training and education over the past 20 years.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, in recent years, more common core subjects such as leadership and combat field craft have been added at the expense of technical training.

In 1995, the services adopted the Interservice Training Review Organization (ITRO), which identified common technical training requirements among the services and designated a specific service to conduct the training. Most of the skills are at the initial entry level. Services may augment the agreed upon common level training based on their specific technical requirement for the Military Occupational Skill. As an example, in the case of Engineer Military Occupational Skills, the common core vertical skills (carpenters, plumbers, and masons) for all services are trained by the Navy. Horizontal construction equipment and heavy equipment mechanics are trained by the Army. Electricians are trained by the Air Force and the Defense Mapping School trains topographic skills. The ITRO program has done a lot to foster joint training and reduce redundancies between the services. However, there has not been an increase in resources to handle the additional workload generated by training all services at one location. In the case of heavy equipment operators prior to ITRO, the student to equipment ratio was 1:1. With the introduction of ITRO it is now 2:1. There are two students assigned to each piece of equipment. As a result students now get half the operator time than those trained prior to the introduction of the ITRO program.<sup>23</sup>

The ITRO program generally provides a baseline for training with heavy emphasis at the Initial Entry Training level. Individual services continue their education processes based on their skill level requirements. The Air Force and Navy generally put a higher emphasis on technical training than the Army.<sup>24</sup> A Navy or Air Force carpenter is taught to a level of apprentice, journeyman, and master level in accordance with the Uniform Building Code, a civilian standard for construction. The Army, however, focuses on theater of operation (TO) or expeditionary standards. TO standards are outdated because they provide only rudimentary levels of life safety protection and do not support the current operational requirements. For example, electrical standards for the number of electrical outlets installed in each tent are insufficient for

today's operational requirements, as well as quality of life standards. This condition forces soldiers to improvise which creates potentially unsafe conditions. From a construction standpoint, the operational requirements for computers and environmental control units, combined with the increased quality of life standards needed for an all volunteer force, requires all construction work within any area of operation to be performed to building code standards.<sup>25</sup> In another example, Army medics are trained as a level I Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) where their civilian equivalent is trained as a Level II EMT. If units want to provide a higher level of competent medical care to its soldiers they need to resource the training themselves because the Army doesn't recognize or can not afford the higher standard at the unit level.<sup>26</sup> In addition to increasing the amount of technical training a noncommissioned officer receives, the Army also needs to integrate institutional training with recruitment and retention efforts and leverage existing educational benefits such as eArmyU.

#### Civilian Education Opportunities

As mentioned earlier, most of the civilian educational opportunities offered by the military are not synchronized with the needs of the soldier while serving in the Army but rather to prepare the soldier for employment when they leave military service. The implementation of eArmyU has started to integrate career development and college level course work in select MOS's through the Servicemembers' Opportunity Colleges Army Career Degree (SOCAD) Program. For select MOS's, the SOCAD program provides college credit for specific military training with some of the 29 regional colleges and universities in 147 certification and degree programs affiliated with eArmyU.<sup>27</sup> Most of these programs are in the medical and aviation fields with a few in the law enforcement, information management, and other fields. The SOCAD program not only provides soldiers college credit for the military training, but also incorporates this credit into a degree program enabling the soldier to get a college degree provided they complete all degree requirements. Soldiers participating in eArmyU and the SOCAD program receive 100% reimbursement for tuition and books as well as a laptop computer provided by the Army. This is the type of program the Army needs to expand. The Army needs to link the SOCAD program to the formal education requirements of the soldier. The challenge is that many MOS programs of instruction are not at the level required by civilian education standards, and thus can not be included in the SOCAD program.

EArmyU has augmented the SOCAD program by creating the Credentialing Opportunities Online (COOL) program to link Army MOS's with civilian licensure and certification.<sup>28</sup> The program is still being developed but it integrates Army MOS's with all state licensure and

certification requirements or to a national standard where applicable. This is a step in the right direction and has direct applicability to the formal Army education process.

#### NCOES Redesign Initiative by the Combined Arms Center

On 18 May 2005, the Commanding General of the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) approved transformation of the Noncommissioned Officers Education System.<sup>29</sup> The intent is to transform the structure and content of the NCOES to support an Army at War, the modular force, stabilization, and the ARFORGEN model. Changes to NCOES include additional Common Core training, redesigning the Primary Leadership Development course to be the Warrior Leader Course, and shorten the resident course for BNCOC and ANCOC to eight weeks in residence by incorporating distance learning. The following is the focus for educating noncommissioned officers under the current initiative:

1. Focus on leading and warfighting – today.
2. Develop innovative leaders capable of leading in the uncertain and complex environments.
3. Technical expertise must exist inside a warrior-first mentality.
4. Reinforce the foundation of ethical decisionmaking and Army values.
5. Instruction that trains leaders for the next job and prepares them for future responsibilities.

The goal was to limit resident courses to eight weeks by eliminating unneeded courses and expanding the distant learning media. As a result, the Warrior Leader Course (WLC) was redesigned to better prepare soldiers for asymmetric warfare. As part of this redesign, 39 Warrior Tasks and nine drills were incorporated into the Situation Training Exercise (STX). Additionally, a transformed Reserve Component 15-day WLC is currently being staffed with National Guard Bureau and the Army Reserve. The course is compliant with The Army Training System (TATS), includes 55 hours of distance learning media, and incorporates leader performance and evaluation training during an STX. In BNCOC, the Common Core was increased by approximately 38 hours but the course length was reduced to eight weeks in accordance with the TRADOC guidance. A workshop hosted by the Center for Army Leadership resulted in 91 of 108 courses redesigned to meet the reset cycle of the ARFORGEN model. Additionally, 36 courses requested a total conversion of over 2,300 hours to distance learning media. ANCOC also reduced course lengths and eliminated non-relevant course content as directed by CG TRADOC. All Career Management Fields, with the exception two

courses, met the eight-week model. Like BNCOC, 30 ANCOC courses have requested a total conversion of 2,532 hours to distance learning.<sup>30</sup>

This initiative is a step in the right direction to improve the career development of the noncommissioned officer corps and addresses some of the fundamental challenges with the system. It starts the move away from a rigid select-train-promote system to a train-select-promote environment that is better suited for the contemporary operational environment. That said the increased reliance on distance learning media has some disadvantages. It assumes soldiers can allocate the time to a self-directed study and they have a learning aptitude for distant learning environments. The distance learning concept requires further development and should provide options tied to a performance standard rather than a rigid program.

#### Emerging Missions: Joint Interoperability and Homeland Security

The OPTEMPO created by Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and the other operations of the War on Terror are taking their toll on the US Army. This environment drives a need for increased investment for quality over quantity if the US Army is to prosecute the "long war".<sup>31</sup> Joint interoperability and homeland defense, more specifically in the area of defense support to civil authorities (DSCA), are two operational requirements that reinforce the need to redesign the Noncommissioned Officer Education System. Both concepts acknowledge the Army's requirement to either work along side other service components or work with civilian counterparts. Joint interoperability has two fundamental components. Units from various services must be able to work together to a common standard, and a unit from one service should be able to replace a unit from another service and continue the same mission.

In the area of defense support to civil authorities, military units work hand-in-hand with civilian counterparts. The skill and capabilities of a soldier in a technical MOS must be to the same standard as their civilian counterpart. Arguably there are some Military Occupational Specialties that are equivalent. However, most military skill levels are less than those of their civilian counterpart. The Reserve and National Guard are more likely to possess skills equivalent to civilian counterparts due to civilian career fields. To rely on the reserve components to fill the skills gap is unreasonable. If the military is going to take an expanded role in the defense support to civil authorities' mission then the military needs to be trained to perform to the same standard as their civilian counterpart. There is no reason an active duty soldier should not be trained to the level of their civilian counterpart.

Increased technical capability is crucial in defense support to civil authorities specifically in the area of disaster response missions. As part of the Federal Emergency Management

Agency's (FEMA) capabilities, the National Response Plan (NRP) identifies government agencies that have specific areas of responsibility based on their area of expertise. The areas of responsibilities are known as Emergency Support Functions (ESFs). There are 15 ESFs, each with designated lead and support agencies. Each agency responsible for an ESF has a dedicated cadre and resources available for timely response. For example, the Department of Transportation is responsible for ESF 1 – Transportation. The Corps of Engineers is responsible for ESF 3 - Infrastructure.<sup>32</sup> The Department of Defense is not responsible for an ESF but provides support across all ESFs, as needed, when available, and as a last resort. The support DOD provides is to augment and integrate into the existing FEMA/ESF structure, which means working alongside government agencies and their contractors. This requires military units to perform work to the same standard their counterparts are held to. In the case of construction work the standard is defined by the local building code, which normally follows the nationally recognized Uniform Building Code. It also means environmental and safety (OSHA) requirements are met. Army units are not prepared to do this effectively because they often lack the level of proficiency required.<sup>33</sup>

### Recommendations

This paper addresses one aspect of the much broader subject of the transformation of Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development. In order to narrow the scope of the paper the research focused strictly on better education within the Noncommissioned Officer Education System. From a broader perspective, the Army needs to assess whether the current structure of the enlisted ranks is correct for the future all-voluntary Army. Should the Army continue the conscription era structure where, by design it anticipates large attrition rates of enlisted soldiers within the first five years that causes a continuous expense for recruitment and training? Or should the Army create a more career oriented noncommissioned officer corps in order to leverage experience and create a more capable force? The latter recommendation enables the Army to channel resources currently spent on recruitment and initial training into professional development.

The ultimate goal is to create an education system that is integrated with career development as well as retention and recruitment. The education system should be based on civilian equivalent standards for degrees, as well as for licensure and certification. In order to keep soldiers from leaving the Army the education would be tied to NCOES to develop the noncommissioned officer over twelve to sixteen years. Essentially, a soldier would receive a degree and comparable civil credentials upon completion of ANCOC. Soldiers would start the

program when they enter Advanced Individual Training (AIT) and build on it throughout their career. The combination of education and experience would make the soldier vastly more marketable after 20 or more years of service than leaving the Army after six, ten, or even fifteen years. Moreover the incentive to continue to serve is tied to something other than monetary bonuses. The Army has a more capable force and focuses resources on professional development rather than recruitment and retention.

The current initiative by the Combined Arms Center to redesign the Noncommissioned Officer Education System is welcomed. The initiative represents only the starting point. The redesign of the NCOES goes beyond courses and curriculum. It needs to redefine MOS career paths and educational requirements. It needs to better incorporate existing programs such as eArmyU and other civilian educational opportunities as professional development as well as recruitment and retention tools in order to eliminate the monetary incentives to maintain or increase MOS strengths. It needs to leverage civilian education opportunities and MOS skill requirements to civilian standard when appropriate. Finally, soldiers should have the same credentials as their civilian counterparts.

The following are five broad recommendations the Army should adopt to better transform the Noncommissioned Officer Education System. The first step is to make fundamental changes to the way the Army views institutional training. If the Army is truly committed to lifelong learning it needs to create a direct correlation between the lifelong learning concept and noncommissioned officer professional development. Today's soldiers are motivated by education. The Army needs to capitalize on this. In the end, both the soldier and the Army will benefit. The lifelong learning concept is structured to meet the needs of the combat arms MOS's more than combat support and combat service support MOS's. This is because it emphasizes the Army's core competencies and not technical capabilities. Instead of looking at time spent in institutional training as a distracter, the Army should view education and training a force multiplier. The Army has long recognized the importance of the Officer Education System particularly at the senior officer level with Command and General Staff and the War College. It needs to do the same for enlisted soldiers. The time a soldier spends in training and away from a unit should be viewed positively. Institutional training, if done correctly, provides an opportunity for personal development away from the demands of leading soldiers. It offers a chance for the soldier to slow down and reflect on their profession. With the current OPTEMPO, down time to decompress is needed for the health of the force.<sup>34</sup> The TTHS account is viewed as a way to account for soldiers in what is considered a nonproductive status. There is continual pressure to reduce the number of soldiers in the TTHS account. As a result

educational programs are reduced. Soldiers in a student status should be separated from the TTTHS account by creating a separate system to account for soldiers in institutional training. The Army will become a better trained force if it incorporates more technical education in its institutional training.

The second step is to identify civilian education and certification requirements for each Military Occupational Specialty. Years ago the Army could set its own standards. Now the increased use of technology and quality of life expectations has driven the Army to tie its standards to civilian standards. With the Army adopting civilian standards for education and certification, it can leverage the work and analysis already accomplished by civilian agencies. Transitioning noncommissioned officer education requirements to civilian equivalent requirements is not a small task. Each MOS will need to be analyzed. Some occupations require certification based on experience and skill competence, while others have more formal educational or certification requirements. Scuba divers and firefighters fall into a category where a minimum amount of formal education is required, and individuals advance based on technical competence achieved through experience. Conversely, there are more formal education requirements required for electricians and mechanics. The education is reinforced through experience.

There are some instances where military specialties have significant civilian utility but do not have a well-defined civilian equivalent. The Prime Power Technician (21P) is a good example where the military school provides a better education than anything available in the civilian sector.<sup>35</sup> There is only one civilian school that offers a comparable degree. This creates a retention challenge because Prime Power Technicians are extremely marketable in the civilian sector. The bulk of their training occurs early in their careers rather than being distributed throughout their career.

Third, the Noncommissioned Officer Education System needs to integrate the civilian equivalent technical training with military training based on the previously established MOS career paths. The common core subjects dealing with leadership and combat field-craft are vital for a noncommissioned officer but this instruction needs to be balanced with technical requirements of a given MOS. The current trend is to make everyone an infantryman. This approach while understandable is short-sighted and detrimental to the long-term health of the Army. As specific career paths are developed that balance technical MOS training with common core military skills, the lifelong learning concept as it applies to a given technical MOS will take shape. The Army also needs to realize there are multiple paths a soldier can take to achieve a high level of proficiency. It may be more convenient and more cost effective to the

Army to have a soldier receive technical training through a civilian school offering an equivalent program. This situation is particularly true for Reserve or National Guard noncommissioned officers. The goal should be to set performance standards for technical education and give the soldier the flexibility and tools to achieve these goals. This can be achieved by recognizing that multiple paths are available to meet a given standard. One soldier may opt for a resident NCOES course combined with eArmyU courses while another may achieve the same level of proficiency through a civilian school that offers an equivalent program.

The Combined Arms Center initiative to redesign the NCOES puts increased emphasis on distance learning. This is a very restrictive standard and for some individuals it can be detrimental to their career. Not every individual has the time or resources to take advantage of distance learning. Some soldiers may not be adept at learning through the distance learning media and it may be more effective for the individual to attend a resident course. This is not to say soldiers are not capable of learning through distance learning but recognizes that individuals learn differently and the Army needs to recognize this to foster self-development. If the standards are established based on civilian standards the soldier can opt to use eArmyU, tuition assistance, or other opportunities to get the required education and credentials in technical fields.

Fourth, the eArmyU's SOCAD and COOL programs need to expand to cover all MOS's and must be synchronized with the career development paths. EArmyU and its associated SOCAD program are ideally suited for an active duty or mobilized reserve soldier to give them an opportunity for civilian education. The program recognizes and accommodates the soldiers in the Contemporary Operational Environment. Increasing the educational level of a soldier with a technical MOS is good for the Army because it creates a sense of professionalism and makes qualitative improvements in soldier capabilities. To be successful however, the Army needs to make the educational requirements achievable and education available to soldiers. Leveraging what is already available through eArmyU's SOCAD and COOL programs into the formal noncommissioned officer career development path is an optimal approach.

Finally, none of these recommendations require a significant increase in resources. Most of the recommendations reallocate or make more efficient use of existing resources. Institutional training is critical to the professional development of soldiers. Time spent in the institutional training bases as well as during self-development or distance learning opportunities need to be optimized to provide soldiers with the effective training and make the most of their limited time. In order to do this the Army needs to leverage every available resource. This can be accomplished in a number of ways. Computer simulators and small-scale computer

interface can be used to train soldiers on appropriate subjects where physical training aids or space are not available. Mini or small sized equipment can be used to reduce the expense of procuring, operating, and maintaining full sized equipment and space requirements. The operation or procedures required to operate or repair a given system are identical regardless of the type or size. More importantly, as the Army increases the training level of soldiers they will learn more about the theory behind the various concepts and be able to adapt them to other situations. As mentioned earlier, when the ITRO program was introduced at the Engineer School, class sizes for heavy equipment operators increased, as a result operator hands-on training was cut in half. The Engineer school has leveraged the use of Partial Task Training Simulators and mini- equipment to train lesser tasks. When soldiers get to the full size equipment their time is better spent on critical operations.

Critics will argue that increasing the education of noncommissioned officers will only increase their marketability and cause a greater retention problem. True, some soldiers will take advantage of the increased education and get out of the Army at the earliest opportunity. If the education is intertwined with career progression and soldier development over a period of twelve to sixteen years they are more likely stay in longer. This is true because the education and experience a noncommissioned officer receives over twenty or thirty years of service will afford them civilian career opportunities they would not otherwise have been competitive for.

If the Army wants a professional force it needs to make a commitment to creating a professional soldier based on both leadership and technical skills. The recommendations add little to the overall TRADOC budget in the long term, but better focus already allocated resources. EArmyU's SOCAD program and various forms of distance learning are already resourced. Integrating the program across all technical MOS's will require some additional resources and increasing the educational standards. These increases in resources are offset by a better enabled, more capable, and more innovative soldier on the ground. It will create a stable and higher quality force and create incentives for soldiers to stay in the Army based on professional development as opposed to monetary rewards.

Future success on the battlefield depends on the Army's ability to leverage both kinetic and non-kinetic means to wage war. If the US Army is going to be an adaptable and innovative force, it must develop soldiers skilled in their specific MOS, proficient in their warrior skills, and possessing language and cultural knowledge. To do this, the Army's system and organizational structure for NCOES needs to change. Career development, education and training, and recruitment and retention must be synchronized. A key to making this work is to better leverage education within the noncommissioned officers professional development.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *2005 Army Modernization Plan*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 2005), 28.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Army, Recruiting Command website, available from <http://www.usarec.army.mil/hq.apa/goals.htm>; Internet; accessed March 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Defense, Defense Advisory Committee on Military Compensation, *Military Retirement Committee Report*, July 2005; available at [www.dod.mil/prhome/docs/dacmc\\_pre\\_rec0106.pdf](http://www.dod.mil/prhome/docs/dacmc_pre_rec0106.pdf); Internet; accessed 3 March 2006.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Army G1 Personnel Authorization Module (PAMXXI) available at <https://www.armyg1.army.mil/pamxxi/secured/mosstructure/mos-charts.asp>; Internet; accessed on 6 January 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Government Accounting Office, *Military Personnel: Preliminary Observations on Recruiting and Retention Issues Within the U.S Armed Forces* (Washington D.C.: Government Accounting Office, March 2005) 11 and 15. Tables in the report show three out of eleven "Hard to Fill" MOS's on active duty are technical MOS, and 100%, or 16 out of 16 "Hard to Fill" MOS's in the Reserve component are considered "Hard to Fill". Additionally, in the "Underfilled" category eight of ten are technical MOS's.

<sup>7</sup> Government Accounting Office, *Management and Oversight of Selective Reenlistment Bonus Program Needs Improvement* (Washington D.C.: Government Accounting Office, Nov 2002) 1.

<sup>8</sup> Government Accounting Office, *Military Personnel: Preliminary Observations on Recruiting and Retention Issues Within the U.S Armed Forces* (Washington D.C.: Government Accountability Office, March 2005) 15.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Military Personnel: Reporting Additional Service Member Demographics Could Enhance Congressional Oversight*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Accounting Office, September 2005), 92.

<sup>10</sup> Leonard Wong, "Generations Apart: Xers and the Boomers in the Officer Corps" (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, Oct 2000), 13. The paper was an analysis of the Xers and Boomers in the officer corps however much of the analysis applies equally well to enlisted soldiers.

<sup>11</sup> This statement is from multiple briefings by the Chief of Staff of the Army.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Military Personnel: Reporting Additional Service Member Demographics Could Enhance Congressional Oversight*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. government Accounting Office, September 2005), 50.

<sup>13</sup> This comment was made in a number of briefings by senior Army leaders on Army Transformation.

<sup>14</sup> This comment is based on the authors first hand experiences in both Afghanistan and Iraq, similar stories have resonated informally throughout the Army.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Army War College speaker - non-attribution January 2006.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, Training and Doctrine Command, Combined Arms Center, PowerPoint Briefing: *Noncommissioned Officer Education System Transformation* (Fort Leavenworth KS, Combined Arms Center, November 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, Training and Doctrine Command, Combined Arms Center, *Operations Order 05-165A NCOES Transformation*, Fort Leavenworth KS, Combined Arms Center, July 2005) A-2.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Institutional Leader Training and Education*, TRADOC Regulation 250-10 (Fort Monroe, VA: TRADOC, 2002) 52.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, Training and Doctrine Command, Combined Arms Center, *Information Paper: Noncommissioned Officer Education System Transformation* (Fort Leavenworth KS, Combined Arms Center, January 2006) 1.

<sup>21</sup> Based on the authors random analysis of various MOS.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, *Operations Order 05-165A NCOES Transformation*, A-2.

<sup>23</sup> Mr. Roy Wildric, U.S. Army Engineer School Department of Leader and Training Development, telephone interview by author 1 Dec 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Author's analysis of the Navy and Air Force training models and experience working with those services.

<sup>25</sup> This comment is based on the author's personal experience working with FEMA and ESF-3 on numerous disasters to include recovery efforts for seven hurricanes and the World Trade Center.

<sup>26</sup> Andrea Pedrick, "College Helps Army Train Medics," Fort Drum Blizzard, 2 February 2006, p.12. Author contacted the individuals mentioned in the article 1LT Benjamin Wilson and SFC Michael LaClair for clarification and more details.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, Human Resources Command, Army Continuing Education System (ACES) and Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, Army Career Degree Program, available at <http://www.soc.aascu.org>: Internet accessed 18 October 2005.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Army Credential Opportunities On-Line website <http://www.cool.army.mil>, accessed Feb 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, *Information Paper: Noncommissioned Officer Education System Transformation*, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>31</sup> U.S. President George W. Bush, *State of the Union Address*, Washington D.C., 30 January 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Department of Homeland Security, *National Response Plan* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005) 10.

<sup>33</sup> This statement is based on the author's works at US Northern Command specifically working on this subject.

<sup>34</sup> This statement is based on comments made by MG Huntoon the Commandant of the U.S. Army War College at his opening address.

<sup>35</sup> This statement is based on the authors previous experience as the Commandant of the U.S. Army Prime Power School, Fort Belvoir, VA