



# The Criticality of Captains' Education

## Now and in the Future

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*Education is not a tax—it is an investment in the future leaders of our Army.*

—Major General Edward Cardon

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*PHOTO: The commander of Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, coordinates with his platoon leader during a Combined patrol led by Afghan National Army soldiers in Sabari, Afghanistan, 17 January 2010. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Jeffrey Alexander)*

**T**ODAY'S OFFICERS ATTENDING the Captains Career Course (CCC) have a wealth of experience and training obtained while serving in an Army at war. However, each captain's learning has been both unique and limited to the jobs he held, specific deployment training, and operational experiences. In contrast, education provides breadth to his learning. Education is the linchpin that allows him to make sense of his experiences and training. It also conditions his mind to learning and should inspire him to become a lifelong learner who has the self-awareness, agility, and adaptability to lead our Army. In today's complex operational environment, an individual's ability to understand, learn, and adapt is the key to being successful.

The Army owes its captains who have made the decision to stay past their Active Duty Service Obligation (ADSO) an education that provides them with the knowledge and skills necessary to serve as company commanders and staff officers, leading troops in complex circumstances. To address this significant educational requirement, the Army has 15 different Captains Career Courses across the country.<sup>1</sup> They all have varying standards and conditions designed to address the unique requirements associated with each branch. This diversity presents challenges for ensuring the Army meets the education needs to develop its future leaders.

A recent study of the Army's CCCs, directed by Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and Combined Arms Center (CAC) commanders, discovered that, in a time of turmoil characterized by a high operational tempo and limited resources, only about a third of these courses are achieving academic excellence.<sup>2</sup> While the study noted several systemic problems, it also emphasized that there are many unsung heroes across TRADOC doing a tremendous job with the resources available. The study's overarching conclusion was that in order to optimize a captain's learning experience, the



U.S. Army, SFC Leonardo Torres

**U.S. Army CPT Timothy Eastman meets with Afghan village leaders to speak about recent incidents affecting the security in Kandigal Village, Afghanistan, 15 December 2009.**

Army must provide at least two critical things: high-quality small group leaders (SGLs) and a rigorous, relevant curriculum. This conclusion resulted from a review of the role of the Army captain; an examination of the history of the Officer Education System, particularly with respect to captains; an analysis of the current state of the 15 CCCs; and the future of officer education as articulated in TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-2, “*The United States Army Learning Concept for 2015*.”<sup>3</sup>

## **Role of the Army Captain**

Time spent as a captain represents a period of tremendous and increasingly broad professional growth.<sup>4</sup> While the CCC is not a transition between tactical, operational, and strategic art, it is still a critical period for a company grade officer. At this point in their service, most captains face a key career decision to stay beyond their initial ADSO. Deciding to attend the CCC signals a renewed commitment to the profession of arms. Captains will have their first opportunity to command and to shoulder the responsibility of administering the

Uniform Code of Military Justice. Officers will spend the most time at the captain rank, currently an average of 6.3 years.<sup>5</sup> During this period, captains will also serve on staffs ranging from battalion to combatant command.

## **Past Officer Education Studies**

Historically, the Army has been concerned with officer education in general, and in particular captains’ education. This emphasis began with the founding of the first U.S. Army school in 1776 under the Corps of Engineers. Just after World War II, the Army established officer advanced courses specifically to train and educate captains for what would become the Cold War. In studying the problem of captains’ education, the Army has consistently found that captains need more education than training.

Prior to the most recent 2010 CCC Study, there were 11 major studies of officer education, spanning the last 64 years.<sup>6</sup> All of the studies had remarkably similar conclusions. The previous studies generally found there was too much

emphasis on training at the expense of education. They indicated that captains would grow the most through reflection on their experiences in an academic setting involving intellectual challenges and discussions with their peers. Moreover, these challenges needed to come from academic rigor and direct peer contact. This combination would, they generally found, achieve a balance in education and training.

General Martin Dempsey, the TRADOC commander, emphasizes this same need for balance. He has stated in the past that “the Army Leader Development Strategy requires a balanced commitment among the three pillars of leader development—training, education, and experience—and [the strategy] considers the development of leaders to be a career-long process.”<sup>7</sup> Most U.S. Army attempts to alleviate this imbalance have suffered from a lack of priority and resources. The optimal balance between education, training, and experience has been elusive, especially with regard to the time required for education. The one major exception to these findings, at least for captains’ education, was the Combined Arms Services Staff School (CAS3), which was considered an outstanding and valuable course. It was eliminated due to resource constraints with the assurance that its curriculum, which focused on staff skills and problem solving, would be integrated into the existing CCCs.

Now that combat-experienced captains are the norm, the time devoted to their education is even more important to help them make better sense of their operational experiences and training. Retired General Anthony Zinni, former Central Command commander, recently emphasized this point while speaking to students and faculty at the Command and General Staff College (CGSC). He argued that “Education is very important. You cannot skip it. You can make up training but you cannot make up education. The echelonment of education is important and irreplaceable. Without education,

experience is meaningless—they cannot be decoupled.”<sup>8</sup> For too long, the Army has not placed enough emphasis on captains’ education.<sup>9</sup>

## 2010 CCC Study

In February 2010, the CAC commander created a study team from the faculty and students of the Command and General Staff College to examine the current CCCs. Over three months, the team assessed all 15 CCCs based on interviews with key leaders. Then there were focus groups and surveys with students and faculty, a review of key documents, and a formal report. The team’s mission focused on whether or not the CCCs are developing officers consistent with the requirements of Army Regulation 350-1, which states that the CCC “provides captains with the tactical, technical and leader knowledge and skills needed to lead company sized units and serve on battalion and brigade staffs.”<sup>10</sup> The team assessed five interrelated focus areas for each CCC: the curriculum, facilities, governance, staff and faculty, and students. Finally, the timing of the study provided an opportunity to examine the recently implemented 2009 “common core” redesign.<sup>11</sup>

The 2010 CCC study provided a comprehensive snapshot of the current state of the Army’s CCCs, resulting in 47 findings and 71 recommendations. Five key findings are the most important:

- There is no substitute for a high-quality small group leader. Not only must branches select their best and brightest to serve in these positions, but they also must have a certification and development process that transforms these officers into educators.
- The curriculum must be current, relevant, and rigorous. Presently, its development and execution face numerous challenges.
- There should be increased oversight and rigor in CCC governance, especially a formal process to reconcile common core and branch-specific curriculum requirements.

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- Most CCC classrooms need to be updated with educational technology and configured to support small group instruction.

- Students overwhelmingly emphasized the importance of the environment provided by a resident course (instead of distance learning): learning from peers and instructors with diverse backgrounds (Army, other services, and international officers); personal and professional development and networking opportunities; and a time for balance between personal and professional commitments and interests.

The first two findings are so essential to ensuring an optimal learning experience that they warrant further discussion. With respect to the CCC, there is no substitute for a high-quality SGL. Those selected do not have to hold a Ph.D. or master's degree. However, they must receive the proper certification and development (both initial preparation and continuing through their duration as SGLs). Where the study team identified academic excellence at a CCC, all the SGLs were majors, except one school which had a mix of majors and promotable captains. All SGLs had commanded in combat or had similar experience from key and developmental positions. These schools also had rigorous certification and development programs to ensure that their SGLs were best prepared to serve as educators.

Curriculum is the other critical factor for an optimal educational experience. Both the common core and branch-specific portions must be current, relevant, and rigorous. The curriculum should be grounded on current doctrine and incorporate the latest lessons learned from the operational environment. School leadership and faculty must conduct a thorough review of the program of instruction and assessment of the learner to ensure that the learning outcomes are achieved. Clearly, the optimal educational experience and best learning environment would be one with a dedicated and certified SGL, who is teaching the most current and relevant curriculum, supported by an experienced instructional design and developmental staff.

One of the most significant issues identified by the study team was that most CCCs do not sufficiently emphasize the communicative arts, specifically written communication skills. This issue was created in part by the loss of CAS3 and its associated learning outcomes. As evidenced

by the number of majors enrolling in a writing improvement program while attending intermediate level education, the Army must address this deficiency earlier in an officer's career. The CCC curriculum must include more written assignments. TRADOC should also resource each school with communicative arts personnel who are focused on supporting students attending the CCC and conducting faculty development for the SGLs.

The study team found that most of the concerns identified with the 2009 common core redesign were a result of its hasty implementation. The deficiencies will improve over time with subsequent iterations. The common core is based on the principle that all officers should share a common base of fundamental skills. This principle is sound, but application and understanding of these fundamental skills is relative to each officer's branch of assignment. For example, Infantry and Armor branch officers require a deeper understanding of the tactics associated with offensive operations than other officers. Other branches need to understand the fundamentals of offense, but more importantly, they need to know how to best support maneuver from their branches' perspectives. Therefore, aside from the method of delivery, learning objectives, and student assessments, each school must tailor common core lessons to its branch's specific focus.

The study team also conducted a survey and collected demographic data on the FY10 CCC student population. Significantly, the team found that 70 percent of CCC students favored the current 20- to 21-week resident model over current distance learning and temporary duty course hybrids.<sup>12</sup> This finding nearly matched the 72 percent of like-minded bloggers on the CAC commander's blog about the CCC.<sup>13</sup> At every CCC, students and faculty emphasized the educational value of the resident course.<sup>14</sup> The study also revealed that 73 percent of married students attend CCC in an accompanied status.<sup>15</sup>

And while some captains commanded prior to attending the CCC, 81 percent of students had not received command credit prior to their attendance.<sup>16</sup>

## Why Change?

The CCC 2010 study was a focused look at existing captains' education, which has been the result of evolutionary change of the Cold

War, Industrial Age model for professional military education. Concurrent with the CCC study, TRADOC initiated the development of a new learning concept that proposes a significant paradigm shift in how the Army learns. There are four primary drivers of this new learning concept: Army Force Generation; the need to restore balance between the education, experience, and training pillars of leader development; rapid and continuing technological change; and generational differences across the Army that affect how students learn.

## The Army Learning Concept for 2015

“The United States Army Learning Concept [ALC] for 2015 describes “an Army learning model that meets the all-volunteer Army’s need to develop adaptive, thinking Soldiers and leaders capable of meeting the challenges of **operational adaptability** in an era of persistent conflict.”<sup>17</sup> The objective of the ALC 2015 is the creation of a learning continuum that blurs the lines between the operating and generating forces by more closely integrating self-development, institutional instruction, and operational experience. The learning continuum begins when one joins the Army and does not end until one leaves. It is learner-centric, not instructor-centric.<sup>18</sup> ALC 2015 applies to both the Active and Reserve components.

Included in the ALC 2015 is the proposal to change how and where the Army conducts the CCC. The ALC 2015 describes a new learning environment within the Information Age, stating that “by 2015, CCC is envisioned to be a more tailored, modular learning approach completed over time, with a mix of resident and nonresident gated learning events that

include both standardized and tailored learning modules.” It further states, “Common core leader development modules are envisioned to be conducted in a cross-branch, face-to-face setting at the regional learning center by on-site faculty, mobile training teams, networked links to schoolhouse, or a combination of methods depending on location and throughput.” With respect to captain’s education, it concludes, “At this point in the officer’s career, broadening opportunities are available for advanced civil schooling, partnerships with industry, and developmental assignments with other government agencies. . . . Before the transition to field grade, CPTs should have achieved at least half of the credits necessary to earn a Master’s Degree.”<sup>19</sup>

## CCC 2015

Combined Arms Center Leader Development and Education, CGSC, has recently created the School of Advanced Leadership and Tactics (SALT), which is responsible for captains’ education. The school is developing an initial concept for transitioning the 2010 CCC to a 2015 CCC. Upon promotion to first lieutenant, all officers would take an Army Learning Assessment (ALA), establishing a baseline for each officer’s learning requirements. Any significant gaps identified in an officer’s foundational proficiency would be addressed by completion of a preparation course prior to attendance at any resident phases of instruction.

A common core resident phase (similar to CAS3’s learning environment and educational outcomes) would be completed in a peer-to-peer, facilitated, small group seminar at an on-post regional learning center (RLC).<sup>20</sup> An officer can attend the common core phase at an RLC before or after his reassignment, thus allowing greater flexibility to best suit each officer’s circumstances and better support Army Force Generation goals.

The branch-specific phase at branch schools would also be conducted in small groups of peers with educational tracks determined by branch commandants, based on each officer’s prior training, experience, and education. For instance, a branch-detailed Military Intelligence officer may attend a longer branch track while a degreed Engineer officer may attend a shorter branch track. The branch phase

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may add as much as three months of temporary duty separation from family compared to the current CCC model. Finally, each officer would establish a continuing education program. This program would consist of distance learning electives and other resident functional courses, determined by the officer, his branch, and his operational commander to be completed prior to the officer's promotion to major and attendance at Intermediate Level Education.

A cross-walk of the key recommendations from the 2010 CCC study and the ALC 2015 indicates that the intent of the recommendations can be achieved within this new educational construct. SALT has completed some initial work on a timeline and process to ensure the ALC 2015 concepts are developed to both achieve the intended educational experience and synchronize implementation with anticipated resources. The proposed CCC 2015 model is more learner-centric, will better support Army Force Generation, and should make better use of Army resources when compared to the current model.

When CCC 2015 is implemented, three critical questions will need to be answered affirmatively

for it to be successful. First, will captains and their families support the increased personal operational tempo resulting from the distance learning requirements and temporary duty? Second, will the operating force and commanders be willing to provide the time necessary for their officers to complete educational requirements? And finally, will this new educational construct be viewed as an improvement over the existing CCC model and still provide captains that are competent, capable, and willing to lead America's sons and daughters?

## Conclusions

The CCC is essential to developing critical and creative thinkers, agile and adaptive enough to address complex problems. Developing these skills takes time, a rigorous curriculum that addresses all three requirements of AR 350-1, and most important, a quality SGL who can draw out experiences from the students based on adult learning principles. Even in this era of persistent conflict, the Army must continue to invest in officer education.

The CCC is both developmental and progressive. It is developmental because it teaches the skills



U.S. Army, Jeff Crawley

Fort Sill Air Defense Artillery (ADA) Captains' Career Course students and National Park Service rangers are silhouetted against a threatening Oklahoma sky at the Washita Battlefield National Historic Site near Cheyenne, OK. The ADA class went on a staff ride to the battlefield and was given access to sites on private land for a better view, 5 March 2010.

necessary to lead company-sized units and be competent battalion and brigade staff officers. The CCC is also progressive in that it builds on the technical skills initially taught in each branch's basic course. It is the last branch-technical training for many officers.

The CCC is also an essential component in developing each officer's understanding of and commitment to the profession of arms. As its name implies, by deciding to attend the Captains "Career" Course, the officer is acknowledging his willingness to commit to the Army beyond the initial ADSO. General Creighton Abrams, former chief of staff of the Army, once emphasized, "This

is the point that officers make the decision to pass up other things in life and sign on in the officer corps to make the Army their career. It is because they desire to belong to something that has these ideals and strives to get them."<sup>21</sup> The Army should reinforce the captains' decisions with an education that helps them serve well. Education is arguably the most important pillar of the Army Leader Development Strategy, since education allows one to gain better understanding of experiences and training. By committing the necessary resources to ensure a quality education for captains, the Army can demonstrate its commitment to the development of our future leaders. **MR**

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## NOTES

1. The fifteen Captains Career Courses (CCCs) are: Air Defense Artillery; Adjutant General; Army Medical Department (which includes six branches—Nurse Corps, Dental Corps, Medical Corps, Medical Service Corps, Medical Specialist Corps, and Veterinary Corps); Aviation; Chaplain; Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear; Engineers; Field Artillery; Finance; Judge Advocate General; Logistics (which includes Ordnance, Quartermaster, and Transportation); Maneuver (which includes Armor and Infantry); Military Intelligence; Military Police; and Signal.

2. Special Commission of the Combined Arms Center, Report of Findings and Recommendation 2010 U.S. Army Captains Career Course Study, 14 June 2010. The report can be found at <<https://www.dtic.mil/portal/site/dtic/>> using the following accession number for the document: ADB362076.

3. TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-2, *The United States Army Learning Concept for 2015*, Version 0.71 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 1 November 2010).

4. Professional Development of Officers Study, 5 vols., LTG Charles W. Bagnal, director; Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Staff, 1985.

5. Email correspondence with LTC Teresa Wardell, Chief of Officer Personnel Management System Task Force.

6. The eleven major studies were: Gerow Board (1946), Eddy Board (1949), Williams Board (1958), Daily Board (1961), Haines Board (1966), Norris Review (1971), Harrison Board (also called the Review of Education and Training for Officers, 1978), Professional Development of Officers Study (1985), Officer Personnel Management System XXI Study (1999), Army Training and Leader Development Panel (2002), and Leader Development and Education Task Force (2003).

7. GEN Martin E. Dempsey, "Our Army's Campaign of Learning," AUSA Institute of Land Warfare Landpower, Essay No. 09-3, November 2009, 6.

8. CGSC Lecture at Fort Leavenworth, KS, 11 April 2009.

9. See LTC Kelly C. Jordan, "The Yin and Yang of Junior Officer Learning: The AUSA Historical Development of the Army's Institutional Education Program for Captains," AUSA Institute for Land Warfare Landpower, Essay No. 49, October 2004.

10. Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development* (Washington, DC: GPO, 18 December 2009), para. 3-32, 70.

11. Common Core curriculum is 7.5 weeks of keystone and capstone doctrinal foundations (FMs 3-0, 5-0, 6-0, 7-0, and 6-22) that every U.S. Army captain receives.

12. Based on the team's student survey results for the question, "Given the following options for CCC attendance, please select the option you would prefer." 69.53% of the students chose "Current (approximately 20-21 week) resident attendance at CCC." There were four other possible responses, which included options of a blended learning concept with a reduced temporary duty resident course (with varying lengths) and distance learning (of varying lengths) (2010 CCC Study).

13. See CAC commander's blog at <<http://usacac.army.mil/blog/blogs/frontier6/archive/2010/03/15/captain-career-course-proposed-concept.aspx>>.

14. Based on faculty and student focus groups' feedback and student demographic data collected from CCCs during each site visit. This data includes the entire student population for the current year (2010 CCC Study).

15. *Ibid.*

16. Based on the team's student surveys, 27 percent of the respondents commanded prior to attending CCC, however, only 19 percent received key and developmental command credit due to serving as a commander for more than 12 months (2010 CCC Study).

17. ALC 2015, 1.

18. Instructor-centric learning is characterized by the instructor as the expert and the institution determining what and how learning occurs. Learner-centric learning is characterized by the instructor as facilitator guiding the learning process with the learner determining what and how to learn.

19. ALC 2015, 44.

20. Regional Learning Centers will be established at stateside and overseas installations to enhance and extend the learning environment to meet learner needs across their career spans. TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-2, 14.

21. Lewis Sorley, *Thunderbolt: General Creighton Abrams and the Army of His Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 176.