Retaining the Warrior Spirit

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The transition out of current combat operations is unique for the United States Army because it ends the longest duration of warfare by an all-volunteer force in U.S. history. This transition, along with the current fiscal constraints, brings a number of challenges. The reduction in the size of the Army and the squeeze of a tighter defense budget are the most publicized issues that senior Army leaders are facing. However, another concern that gets little attention outside of the military is the potential flight of talented and experienced junior leaders after the excitement of combat is no longer available. Related to this is another less visible, yet significant issue, namely, the possible loss of the warrior spirit that currently pervades the Army and contributed so much to its success in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Many criticisms of military leadership practices and the Army's preparedness for war rose in the peacetime environment of the late 1980's and 1990's which downplayed the importance of a warrior mentality as a necessity for dealing with the stress of close quarters combat.

With the advent of prolonged conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001, and as a means of re-aligning the Army with the basic tenets of warrior heritage, then Army Chief of Staff Gen. Erik Shinseki introduced the Soldier's Creed in 2003.[1] The purpose of the creed was to infuse a common code within the Army to help produce victory on the battlefield. The Soldier's Creed (which contains the four lines dubbed the *Warrior Ethos*) was intended to instill a certain spirit amongst professional soldiers. Internalizing the published ethos took little time, given the ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As the Army returns to a peacetime posture, while the spoken ethos endures as part of the officially published creed, the spirit of the individual warrior that provided true meaning to the ethos is in danger of diminishing as combat becomes more remote as a normal part of organizational culture.

Fortunately, though evolutionary changes in the military are rapid in wartime, they are much slower during peacetime.[2] This condition affords senior Army leaders a window of opportunity for maintaining the spirit and preventing the published warrior ethos from degrading to nothing more than a few lines

of memorized text. Nevertheless, if senior leaders do not aggressively create a command climate in peacetime that fosters risk taking, trust, and leader accountability, the warrior spirit is likely to dissipate altogether soon after complete cessation of combat operations in Afghanistan.

Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates expressed concern for such inherent problems associated with a drawdown prior to his departure from office in 2011, saying,

> Men and women in the prime of their professional lives, who may have been responsible for the lives of scores or hundreds of troops, or millions of dollars in assistance, or engaging

Pfc. Patrick Murphy (right) delivers a vicious kick to the head of Pvt. Zach Rabenold in their bout during the final night of the modern army combatives tournament held as part of the 82nd Airborne Division's All American Week celebration at Fort Bragg, 21 May 2008.

(U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Pryor, 2nd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div. Public Affairs)

U.S. Army 1st Lt. Joseph Brockbank (middle), 4th Squadron, Combined Task Force Dragoon, walks with a member of the Afghan Uniformed Police after engaging with local village elders 16 December 2013, at Kandahar Province, Afghanistan.

Retired Master Sgt. Christopher Corbin, a wounded warrior with Troops First, takes a last look around before departing Forward Operating Base Fenty, Afghanistan, 10 July 2014.

or reconciling warring tribes, may find themselves in a cube all day re-formatting PowerPoint slides, preparing quarterly training briefs, or assigned an ever-expanding array of clerical duties….The consequences of this terrify me.[3]

While Gates may have been referring mainly to potential issues related to retaining proven warriors that find themselves in an unchallenging and boring peacetime environment, it is the loss of the warrior spirit that these leaders shared within the Army that is the greatest cause for concern.

The Warrior Spirit and the Warrior Ethos

To properly define the warrior spirit it is necessary to break the term apart and define its individual components. *Warrior* is a term synonymous with soldier in contemporary times. Military professionals are comfortable with this definition of warrior while *spirit* may be defined in several different ways.

The Google definition of spirit is "the nonphysical part of a person that is the seat of emotions and character."[4] A further definition of spirit is "the principle of conscious life."[5] Combining these two definitions provides an understanding of spirit as the nonphysical principle that guides emotions and character.

When packaging these two individual components of the warrior spirit, the definition produced is as follows: a soldier guided by nonphysical principles of emotions and character. The nonphysical principles alluded to, embodied in the Army's

Warrior Ethos, are subject to adjustment based on the environment in which the soldier operates. However, when a warrior spirit is common amongst the members of the military, sets of martial principles become the foundation of the culture and identity they share.

Unlike previous wars in which the warrior spirit emerged in only those soldiers who fought directly against the enemy across demarcated lines, operations in Iraq and Afghanistan saw the removal of barriers that separated combat functions from administrative and logistics functions. In those wars, the concept of battle lines ceased to exist, resulting in almost every member of a deployed force being exposed to direct enemy attack. Consequently, the common threat of enemy action against nearly all deployed members of the Army resulted in the spontaneous development and expanded relevance of a common warrior ethos.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies bridges the gap between spirit, culture, and ethos by defining the warrior ethos as—

> …a code that expects individuals to aggressively engage and defeat an armed enemy in battle, promoting and valuing traits of moral and physical courage, tactical skills, emotional and physical stamina, loyalty to comrades and determination to accomplish the tactical mission regardless of personal risk.[6]

Recognizing the benefits that would result from an Army infused with a common warrior ethos caused the Army to codify a description of desired qualities in an officially sanctioned document. The Army's Warrior Ethos was subsequently distilled into four lines within what was titled the Soldier's Creed. These lines are: "I will always place the mission first; I will never accept defeat; I will never quit; I will never leave a fallen comrade."[7]

After introducing the concept in 2003, Shinseki included the Soldier's Creed in the 2004 Army Posture Statement.[8] With the U.S. Army simultaneously fighting two wars that consumed nearly half of the available force at any given time, the official pronouncement of the ethos aimed to promote unity, solidarity, and endurance within an overburdened force in the face of shared hardships.

In 2007, the Army promoted further this concept by providing links to information papers associated with the annual posture statement, giving access to clearer explanation of the Soldier's Creed and Warrior Ethos. Still later, in 2008, the information paper on the Warrior Ethos defined it, discussed current and future Army initiatives to instill the ethos, and outlined why it was important to the Army.[9] That paper demonstrated that the Army recognized both the cultural shift occurring in a combat-hardened organization, and also that the spirit embodied in the ethos increased the effectiveness of the Army and a willingness of soldiers to embrace personal sacrifice in order to fight and win.

The Army posture on the Warrior Ethos as discussed in subsequent official pronouncements has not significantly changed since the original paper published in 2008. This suggests that senior Army leaders assumed that the spirit embodied by the current force was sustainable indefinitely without adjusting the approach to account for a lack of actual combat operations.

However, it is noteworthy that while the 2012 Army Posture Statement includes a link to the Warrior Ethos information paper, neither the terms *warrior ethos* nor *warrior spirit* are used in the latest document.[10] The Posture Statement instead focuses on technological innovation, networked forces, and transition to a leaner, more efficient and adaptive force.

Theoretical Leadership

Leading an Army in transition from combat operations to a garrison environment is not a new problem, and the contemporary transition is less problematic than at any other time in history. Not only is the force comprised of volunteers, but the current military culture is habituated to the constant introduction of new technologies to the contemporary battlefield. This decreases the need of the current class of warriors for drastic educational leaps to add technological solutions into the military arsenal.

By comparison, the Army transition following the draw down after Operation Desert Storm (1990-1991) appears to have been easier than what the Army faces today because of the short duration of combat operations. However, despite the seeming advantage of short duration, it is important to note that manpower cuts of over 100,000 within a year of the troops returning home from Desert Storm crippled the force structure that existed in the immediate aftermath of the conflict through the early 1990's.[11]

In a different example, the period of transition at the conclusion of the Vietnam War was more complex because of the suddenly increased pace of technological change due to the advent of computers, military culture shock due to a transition from a draft army to the all-volunteer Army, and pervasive negative views of the armed forces in general held by many in the civilian society. Though the domestic environment and internal military culture are very different than today, studies on leadership from the Vietnam era nevertheless remain pertinent to the discussion of the ongoing changes in the current Army.

Sociologist Dr. Morris Janowitz conducted extensive studies of the military before and during the Vietnam War and published several books on the military in transition. His analysis and findings are as relevant today as when first published.

One of his works, titled *The Professional Soldier,* presented a timeless characterization of the military professional. Janowitz conducted his research amid concerns that the rapid advancement of technology, to include the introduction of nuclear weapons during World War II, would deplete what Janowitz categorized as the "fighter spirit." Admitting that this spirit was difficult to define, he offered that "it is based on a psychological motive, which drives a man to seek success in combat, regardless of his personal safety."[12] This definition reflects the intent of the Army's current formulation of its warrior ethos.

Janowitz studied the warrior (fighter) spirit in combat and concluded that "under these conditions [combat] authority is based less on formal rank and legal authority and more on personal leadership and the ability to create primary group solidarity and small unit effectiveness."[13] His studies also concluded that different leadership characteristics exist, and that increasing technology would transform military leadership toward management and away from the heroic, inspirational leader that united units in combat.[14] Of special note, he observed that the application of managerial leadership, necessary to deal with rapid technological change, threatened to decrease the warrior spirit and carry the Army away from the values that historically had won the nation's wars.

Comparing leadership styles, he observes that a positive characteristic associated with managerial leaders, besides a facility for effectively introducing technological change, is the ability to innovate common practices to increase effectiveness and efficiency.

In contrast, "the heroic leader is a perpetuation of the warrior type, the mounted officer who embodies the martial spirit and the theme of personal valor."[15] The downside to heroic leadership, according to Janowitz, is a reliance on traditionalism that forges ahead in face of the enemy without embracing technological innovation.

The truth of the matter is that the Army needs both kinds of leaders to succeed. The reemergence of the warrior spirit in Iraq and Afghanistan would not have occurred without the presence of heroic leadership, but the presence of military managers maintained the fighting force by forcing technological change that ultimately decreased stress on the soldier.

From the improvement of basic Army system processes, through networked communications to the introduction of vehicles that better survive an explosive blast, the managerial leader enables the heroic leader the opportunity to better lead soldiers in direct combat with the enemy. Not only does the Army require both kinds of leaders, but the leaders who can exercise both managerial and heroic leadership have the capacity to maintain the warrior spirit at the conclusion of combat operations.

Retired Army Lt. Gen. Walter F. Ulmer Jr. contests the notion that heroes and managers come together to form the nucleus of elite leaders, and that "It is the enlightened integration of leadership and management which is essential to creating the climates from which high-performing units emerge."[16] This combination of tangible and intangible skills is the ultimate measure of talent in an officer, and the key to fostering the climate necessary for the warrior spirit to survive.

The timelessness of Janowitz and criticisms of the military during the 1980's and 1990's suggests that the Army is not always filled with talented leaders from top to bottom. A review of Janowitz's leadership model in 1985 led Air Force Lt. Col. Richard Baucom to conclude that the elevated status of the military manager superseded the military's appreciation for the heroic leader. "The balance is being disrupted by several factors that are eroding the respect traditionally accorded the heroic leader within the military profession; with his decline comes a deterioration of the warrior spirit he embodies."[17]

Baucom concluded that these factors included an overemphasis on management and a fascination with technology which produced an imbalance between manager and hero brought about detrimental effects on the warrior spirit.

Similarly, at the conclusion of the Gulf War many senior military leaders questioned the presence of heroic leadership and the warrior spirit that it produces. Based on external social pressures the military strayed from accepting the warrior as a special and unique individual, focusing more on the standardization of all military forces who were heavily reliant on technological solutions to win wars.

Retired Army Gen. William C. Moore showed concern about a departure from the warrior spirit as reflected by a softening of military training standards and prevailing attitudes regarding a widening separation of military and societal values. He wrote, "The ethos of being a warrior is disappearing—unit esprit built around 'bonding' between warriors is now disparaged as an irrelevant concept and one that only serves to rationalize politically incorrect behavior and policies."[18]

Abandoning the warrior ethos in order to conform to societal expectations is not a major factor in a post-Afghanistan Army, but a return to bureaucratic routine with a reversion to reliance on easily measurable statistics as indicators of leadership may have the same effect.

Managerial Routine and Risk Aversion

Prior to combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, much of Army life consisted of highly routine tasks and mundane responsibilities. Unit staffs focused their energy on creating the quarterly training brief by building

U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. James D. Sims, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

National Guard Soldiers from Illinois and surrounding states lift a log during a readiness assessment with 2nd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne) based in Chicago at Marseilles Training Center, 12 April 2014. The weekend assessment is designed to test the physical and mental toughness of the potential Special Forces operators.

lengthy slide presentations and managing resources to execute the approved training events. With a unit's final assessment consisting of an external evaluation at an Army training center, the evaluation of the unit's leaders rested almost entirely on a two-week training exercise. In effect, much of the preparation time of the unit was not controlled by the leadership as various tasks and color-coded training cycles required manpower to support installation maintenance.

The advent of conflict in 2001 changed unit dynamics and priorities significantly as they adjusted to the challenges and rigors of managing deployment cycles and combat operations. However, in anticipation of a reversion to peacetime after more than a decade of conflict, the Army published Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development*. It "prescribes policies, procedures, and responsibilities for developing, managing, and conducting Army training and leader development."[19]

Revised in 2011, AR 350-1 prescribes the official methodology for managing training and developing leaders within the Army. It outlines 24 different tasks that units are required to perform in an annual training cycle together with the majority of legally required training events for Army personnel. The number of tasks as written is not overwhelming, and some of them are completed as a by-product of larger training events, but if combined with other (excessive) assigned tasks imposed by sources who bill them as 'other requirements', a pattern could emerge similar to that of the pre-combat era which would serve to detract from mission readiness and erode the warrior ethos.

For example, reverting to a checklist of mandatory training that consumes training resources and available time can limit energy expenditure on achieving more than the minimum standards. Warriors who are deployed do not necessarily have the constraints of an extensive training checklist placed on them by a higher headquarters, allowing most deployed leaders to address only those training requirements that they identify as valuable. However, as the Army transitions to a peacetime environment, exhaustive managerial routine produced by the burden of checklists and excessive training requirements has great potential for stifling leader creativity to plan and execute valuable combat training that produces a high level of readiness.

Building Talented Leaders

Fortunately, a road map to preserve and continue building heroic leadership is part of the Army's doctrine. Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 6-22 *Army Leadership* defines leadership as "the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization."[20] ADP 6-22 describes both attributes and competencies for leaders who are in line with the description of the heroic leader provided by Janowitz. The attributes that a leader needs to have are specified as character, presence, and intellect.[21] Within these attributes, the qualities that enable the retention of the warrior ethos in subordinates consist of possessing the warrior ethos and confidence, using sound judgment, and exercising interpersonal tact. Additionally, leaders are defined as those who

U.S. Army Pvt. 1st Class Jo Marie Rivera, left, a human resource specialist, and Sgt. 1st Class Rebecca Hamby, a military police officer, both with the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, maintain security for a female engagement team chief during a consultation at a clinic in Tarnak wa Jaldak District, Zabul Province, Afghanistan, 18 September 2013.
(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Kandi Huggins, 3rd BCT, 1st Infantry Division)

display competencies by doing. The competencies that a leader displays are lead, develop, and achieve results.[22] The critical sub-competencies to fostering the warrior spirit are building trust, communicating, creating a positive environment, and becoming a steward of the profession.

With respect to the above, the company-level leader is the Army's foremost steward of the warrior spirit. Company or battery command is the lowest level where legal authorities and command responsibilities are present. This is also the only level of command where almost all subordinates come in contact with their commander on a daily basis. As the commander increases in rank and organizational size the percentage of subordinates he or she interacts with on a personal level decreases. Therefore, the most effective way for senior leaders to maintain the warrior spirit

within the Army during peacetime is to enable the company commanders to take aggressive, calculated risks in training.

In order to enable company-level leaders to engender the trust and confidence of multiple command echelons above them, additional training and education are necessary. To this end, adjustments within the institutional Army military education programs would create a common experience regardless of branch specialty. Attempts at creating such a program formerly existed when all officers attended a common Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC II) before completing branch-specific BOLC III. The program ceased when wartime requirements exceeded the supply of lieutenants graduating from BOLC III. The Army needed officers on a shorter timeline than BOLC II plus BOLC III could produce them. Reintroducing BOLC II to the training regimen for newly commissioned lieutenants would again provide officers the necessary common experience at the outset of their careers.

Irrespective to changes away from BOLC II, adjustments to the Captains Career Course (CCC) since the beginning of the war have endured and demonstrate that the Army values leadership instruction at the highest level, and equally values a baseline of leadership training in all branches of service. Every captain begins their CCC instruction with a common block of instruction.

This adjustment of CCC curriculum across all Army branches is stipulated in AR 350-1. While branch courses still contain specific tactical, technical, and staff instruction there is a separate, common-core portion of each course that is identical across the Army.[23] A review of the Field Artillery Officer Advanced Course, the precursor to the CCC program of instruction from 1978, reveals 39.7 hours of instruction directly related to leadership in a 26-week curriculum.[24] The common-core instruction in 2010 provided students with 44 hours of leadership in only an eight-week curriculum.

In the case of the 2010 Field Artillery CCC, consisting of 24 weeks of instruction, another 119.9 hours in the classroom are dedicated to battery commander-specific leadership training.[25] This serves as a concrete example of the importance that the Army places on leadership development. More importantly, the increased emphasis on leader development is meant to perpetuate the warrior spirit.

A U.S. Special Forces soldier assigned to Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan fires a Carl Gustav recoilless rifle after receiving small-arms fire during a clearance of Denasaro Kelay Village in Mizan District, Zabul Province, Afghanistan, 8 March 2014. USSF soldiers were helping Afghan forces conduct clearance operations to disrupt insurgent movement in the area.

U.S. Army photo by Spc. Sara Wakai, 55th Combat Camera

Combat allows company-level leaders to put instruction into practice. As the requirements outlined in AR 350-1 receive less emphasis during combat operations, the oversight on managerial-type tasks decreases as well. As Janowitz observed with regard to the Vietnam conflict, even in the late 1960's "the elaborate regulations and procedures of the military are attenuated during operational assignments."[26]

By equipping the commanders with sufficient leadership education, and providing a laboratory for experimentation, the company-level leader can build and maintain the warrior ethos in his subordinates. Senior Army leaders must replicate combat conditions through realistic training that encourages critical thinking and risk taking over an extended training period. A two-month collective training period conducted only two to three times per year is not good enough. Even if the level of leadership education continues, a time-constrained environment where leadership is measured in a two-week external evaluation limits experimentation and risk-taking. This does not allow for experimentation on the part of the leader and can negatively impact the spirit of the soldier.

Leader Evaluation and Risk Management

In the absence of combat operations the retention of the warrior spirit requires rigorous and realistic training. Unfortunately, assessing the quality of a training event is subjective and particularly problematic for a senior commander who does not have the available time to closely observe the training of all subordinate elements.

On top of the difficult assessment process, the senior commander needs a rehabilitation mechanism which can correct subordinate commander deficiencies as identified.[27] In a situation where a commander identifies an honest mistake in combat, a correction can be put in place in short order to remedy the situation. This allows the subordinate to improve and not make that mistake again. However, in a training environment the commander is much more likely to hold a single mistake against a subordinate, not allowing him to recover from the incident. This reality stifles risk-taking and individual initiative in training that would allow company-level commanders to learn what works and what does not work. In a zero-defects training environment, subordinate commanders with fewer training opportunities may very well cease experimentation and adopt only proven perfunctory training processes in order to make fewer mistakes. This not only threatens to create less capable leaders, but also force commanders to compare their subordinates using narrow and superficial objective measures.

Objective measures of commander performance are problematic. At least one senior officer has observed that they are at the same time both easily collected and the least valuable indicators of heroic leadership.[28] Yet, these objective measures were the basis for many superior performance reviews prior to immersion in contemporary combat operations. Some experienced senior leaders have warned about basing leadership assessments only on superficial and misleading, but easily quantifiable, data.[29]

For instance, the operation readiness rate, historically a measure of command competence, provides no real check on leadership. Rather, it is a measure of management performance. Recognizing this, if a

subordinate knows that a performance evaluation relies on one quantifiable measure valued by the boss, enormous incentive is created to inflate the measure by resorting to misleading means.

For example, leaders can cease using certain pieces of reportable equipment in training for fear of breaking them in order to create the appearance of operational readiness in certain categories. Not using equipment raises ratings artificially by assuring that equipment is reported as operational on rating reports but in reality reduces operator—as well as unit—readiness by eliminating the ability to train on the equipment. Ambitious but short-sighted and ineffective leaders, who see only the next evaluation or reporting period, may resort to such a strategy to enhance individual chances for promotion. Subordinates to such leaders see such actions too, which can cause them to either lose trust in their leader and the system, emulate their leader's behavior, or both, especially if such leaders are in the end rewarded by the system. Obviously, people and systems that reward superficial and unethical behavior eventually will be exposed as incapable and untrustworthy—hopefully, not in combat.

Trust in the Organization

Trust is the cornerstone of an effective organization as well as a component of a leader's competency. It is critical that trust exists in an organization because it is the "one specific component of the morale and cohesiveness mosaic which appears crucial, and whose absence or dilution is particularly detrimental to effectiveness over time and under stress."[30]

Leaders who fail to build trust in their organizations, both up and down the chain of command, create an environment of suspicion that stifles individual initiative. Trust creates transparency in a unit, allowing subordinates to provide constructive feedback on command decisions. In conjunction, seeking feedback or opinions from subordinates prior to an official decision is a greater builder of trust, as it creates buy-in to the direction of the organization.

Moreover, trust is the cornerstone of the concept of mission command. It requires commanders to know the character and traits of subordinates and trust that each can achieve the intent of the operation.[31]

Such trust tends to develop quickly in a combat environment because of the amount of time leaders and soldiers spend together and the stress under which they operate. In contrast, in the absence of a combat environment, trust takes longer to develop. This is problematic given the relaively short time frames that govern officer moves.

Unfortunately, the vital importance of trust to an organization is sometime highlighted by the actions of the untrustworthy. The presence of an ineffective or incompetent leader anywhere in the organization has detrimental effects that are often quickly observable and which undermine the trust required to build effective units.

The Army strives to identify such poor leaders and rehabilitate them by training and mentorship, or, in extreme cases, by dismissing them for the good of the service. The acute problem with this methodology is that subordinates must suffer through the training and rehabilitation periods of leaders who are not performing at an acceptable level.

As the Army transitions to "a leaner, adaptive, flexible and integrated force" it may be necessary to remove poor leaders more quickly in order to maintain the necessary trust within the institution.[32] The removal of poor leaders is a matter of both institutional and personal accountability. Tolerating continued employment of poor leaders violates the trust that "is the bedrock of our honored profession."[33] Whether it is the bureaucratic nature of the organization that does not allow the rapid departure of poor leaders, or an inability to identify poor leaders, the Army needs to improve in this area.

One way to achieve early identification of deficient leaders would be an improved evaluation system. The current officer and noncommissioned officer evaluation systems are tiered to take into account the perspective of the rater and senior raters only. This method is inherently flawed because it gives no input to those personnel most intimately knowledgeable of the leadership of the rated individual. Subordinate feedback is not included in the evaluation systems and it is against current Army standards of conduct to seek subordinate feedback when completing a performance evaluation.

Though a 360-Degree Leader Assessment is now required by Army regulation for all field grade officers, this assessment is not yet incorporated into the evaluation process. In fact, the results of this requirement are seldom used for any purpose other

than personal reflection. As a result, at present, the sum-total of input of subordinates to a leadership assessment is a rater asking subordinate officers if they have completed the requirement, and many times the question is not even asked.

Nevertheless, implementing a subordinate leader assessment to determine leadership capacity may be fraught with problems, the largest of which is that it potentially could turn selection for leadership positions into popularity contests. One obvious problem is that a popular leader may not necessarily be the most effective in terms of mission accomplishment. Therefore, whether an effective subordinate leader assessment concept works or not again boils down to trust. If trust exists throughout the organization then we can trust the judgment of our subordinates concerning the competence and quality of the leadership that potentially would lead them into harm's way. A proposal for both capturing subordinate feedback and determining the authenticity of the remarks pertaining to the quality of leadership of the individual being evaluated is therefore necessary.

In a related issue, determining what level of subordinates gain input to the leader assessment may be difficult. But, for example, assume that only immediate subordinates would provide input. One avenue for collecting evaluation would be providing subordinates access to a survey on their leaders through Army Knowledge Online.

The exact series of such a battery of questions would require the involvement of experts in psychology, military leadership, and survey techniques and not just the opinions of the author. That said, under the concept, the first question in the survey might ask, "Is this person an effective leader?" If the subordinate answers 'yes' then the survey continues with questions to quantify the leader's positive attributes. If the subordinate answers 'no' then further questioning is required to peel back the reasons behind the negative opinion.

Once the feedback is compiled, a copy is furnished to the rated officer, as well as to the senior rater. Given that senior raters are the most experienced leaders in the chain of command, they could either incorporate the feedback into their portion of the evaluation or discard the results. To complete the feedback loop the senior rater would have to state that the rated officer was counseled on the subordinate feedback regardless of whether or not it affects the officer's evaluation. Despite potential problems, such a system has great potential for weeding out toxic leaders early, and promoting those who have the greatest ability to engender confidence in both their superiors and subordinates. This could greatly enhance the overall command climate of Army units.

Command Climate

The Army understands the importance of a positive command climate. Members of every company-sized unit are required to complete surveys that provide the commander feedback on factors such as leadership, morale, and unit cohesion.[34] While the feedback from these surveys often reinforces a commander's assessment of the status of the unit, it can also highlight specific leadership failures within the chain of command. The in-vogue label for organizationally destructive leadership personalities is *toxic leadership*. Although no exact definition exists, it is accepted that "toxic leaders are individuals whose behavior appears driven by self-centered careerism at the expense of their subordinates and unit, and whose style is characterized by abusive and dictatorial behavior that promotes an unhealthy organizational climate."[35]

Removing leaders that fit this description is an important step to maintaining a command climate that allows the warrior spirit to thrive.

In contrast, if senior leaders do not create the conditions for effective leaders to produce positive command climates, then the warrior spirit will fall victim to risk aversion, distrust, and poor leadership in the Army. Apart from active measures to eliminate toxic leaders, increasing leadership education among company-grade officers to enhance leadership skills, ethics, and technical competence is an excellent step towards building the command climates required to sustain the warrior spirit in soldiers.

Additionally, having transparent conversations about the negative effects of toxic leadership on the Army as an entire organization is also critical. This will demonstrate that the Army's senior leaders are aware that toxic leaders exist in the ranks. However, measures to identify them and remove such toxic leaders from service are as yet inadequate. Such leaders, if identified at all, are currently shuffled to different assignments

instead of being pushed out of the Army, simply allowing them to be toxic someplace else.

Actions are necessary to weed out those leaders who are detrimental to the overall cohesion and morale in individual units. It is not enough to discuss the dangers of poor leadership. The Army must make a concerted effort to dismiss these leaders in order to gain the trust of the talented leaders who combine skilled management with heroic leadership.

Conclusion

The warrior spirit currently exists in the Army, and it is a critical factor in our combat success. As the Army reverts back to a peacetime environment, special efforts must be made to promote an Army-wide command climate that nurtures and preserves the warrior ethos. Otherwise, talented officers and NCOs that are both heroic leaders and expert managers will find another line of work as they lose faith that the Army is serious about remaining a combat-focused institution dedicated to retaining the warrior spirit.

U.S. Army photo by Cpl. Alex Flynn, 70th MPAD

Soldiers of the 184th Security Force Assistance Team (California National Guard) conduct basic range training in Tarin Kot, Afghanistan, 27 September 2013. The 184th SFAT's mission was to advise and assist the Afghan Uniformed Police in Uruzgan Province.

Senior leaders must underwrite subordinate risk-taking and evaluate subordinates on the command climate that they foster at the company level. Also, as the Army transitions to a leaner force there is an opportunity to identify poor leaders, thank them for their service, and force them to find a new line of work. By taking this step, the warrior spirit can remain part of the organizational culture, and the Army can remain capable of accomplishing the mission. ■

Notes

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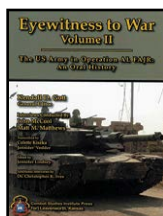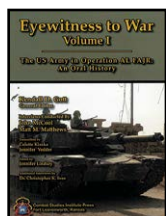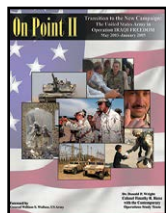
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