



Equipment & Resources Needed

Leadership Innovation in the Reserve Officer Training Corps and the Future of the Force

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Material solutions alone will not provide the decisive edge against the complex array of rapidly adapting threats we face. To answer the challenge of this new paradigm, the Army must invest in its most valuable resource, its people.

—Lt. Gen. Robert B. Brown

The number one priority in the U.S. Army Cadet Command is to produce second lieutenants who contribute to what Lt. Gen. Robert Brown refers to as the Army's "decisive edge" and meet the Army's requirements in an increasingly complex world. The 2014 *U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* (AOC) clearly asserts that the operating environment is changing and so must the Army.¹ The Army's Cadet Command produces over 70 percent of the total officer corps through its programs, and it provides fertile ground to grow the Army of tomorrow.² This contribution to the force constitutes a significant portion of the leaders who will drive this change in the force. My brigade, one of eight that lead Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs across the country, is responsible for identifying, training, educating, and inspiring these future officers. Each day, we

Army ROTC cadets of the Blue Devil Eagle Battalion welcome the Cadet Command deputy commanding officer, Col. Brian J. Mennes, to Duke University for classroom instruction in officership 3 October 2014 in Durham, North Carolina. During the school year, cadets receive multidisciplinary instruction on leadership, ethics, behavioral sciences, and tactics. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Army ROTC)

are learning and adapting our approach and methods to produce the leaders who are capable of meeting and overcoming the challenges of tomorrow.

As our operating environment changes, the Army must consider how to adapt its approach in educating and developing the leaders that will guide the institution through this change. The pace and type of change the AOC describes indicate that many of the current training and education models are becoming irrelevant. Times are changing, and college and university ROTC programs must change with the times to stay relevant. Though the Cadet Command program has produced officers for an Army that is the envy of the world, the limitations of the current program are growing more apparent. Understanding what the AOC demands of future leaders must form the foundation for further action to help reduce or eliminate those limitations. Therefore, Cadet Command—with a national presence in over 270 host institutions and over a thousand partnered colleges—is shifting its training strategy from one largely based on post-World War II models, which are narrowly focused on one type of conflict, to one designed to meet more varied challenges reflective of the times.³

Army Operating Concept Vision

The AOC suggests future conflict will be characterized by an increased velocity and momentum of human interaction. One of the effects of this new dynamic is that future enemies will seek to leverage these interactions by drawing U.S. forces into more complex urban terrain together with other strategies aimed at generally negating

the advantages of U.S. technological superiority.⁴ Additionally, the nature and type of enemy forces the Army will face is also changing. With greater frequency, the Army will encounter situations where irregular forces, nonstate groups, and criminal organizations will either join conventional forces with similar objectives or act unilaterally to accomplish objectives in this complex terrain.

In order to be successful under these conditions, the AOC asserts that the Army must “develop innovative leaders and optimize human performance.”⁵ Such innovative leaders must be capable of succeeding in both “high-tech” and “low-tech” environments—and everything in between. The Army’s *Human Dimension White Paper* stresses this theme, noting that “the basics” of skills relating to successful conduct of warfare have fundamentally changed. Industrial Age warfare characterized by an emphasis on attaining mass for success is giving way to an emphasis on agility and adaptation.⁶ The traditional notion that military leaders must become technical experts in known fields of military science must give way to a broader concept where military leaders possess the capacity to solve a wide array of complex problems with creative solutions derived in part from sources of knowledge outside traditional military studies.

The officer corps of today gained significant experience from years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan that provides some insight into the future conduct of our wars. Our national experience has revealed that the training completed prior to wartime deployments did not adequately prepare military leaders to conduct these wars. In a 2010 study on precommissioning

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training, Maj. Joseph Albrecht discovered contemporary officers criticized their preparation, arguing it placed too much emphasis on task training.⁷ By focusing on technical and tactical preparation, precommissioning training focused on the knowledge and skills required for immediate use on specific, technically oriented tasks vice

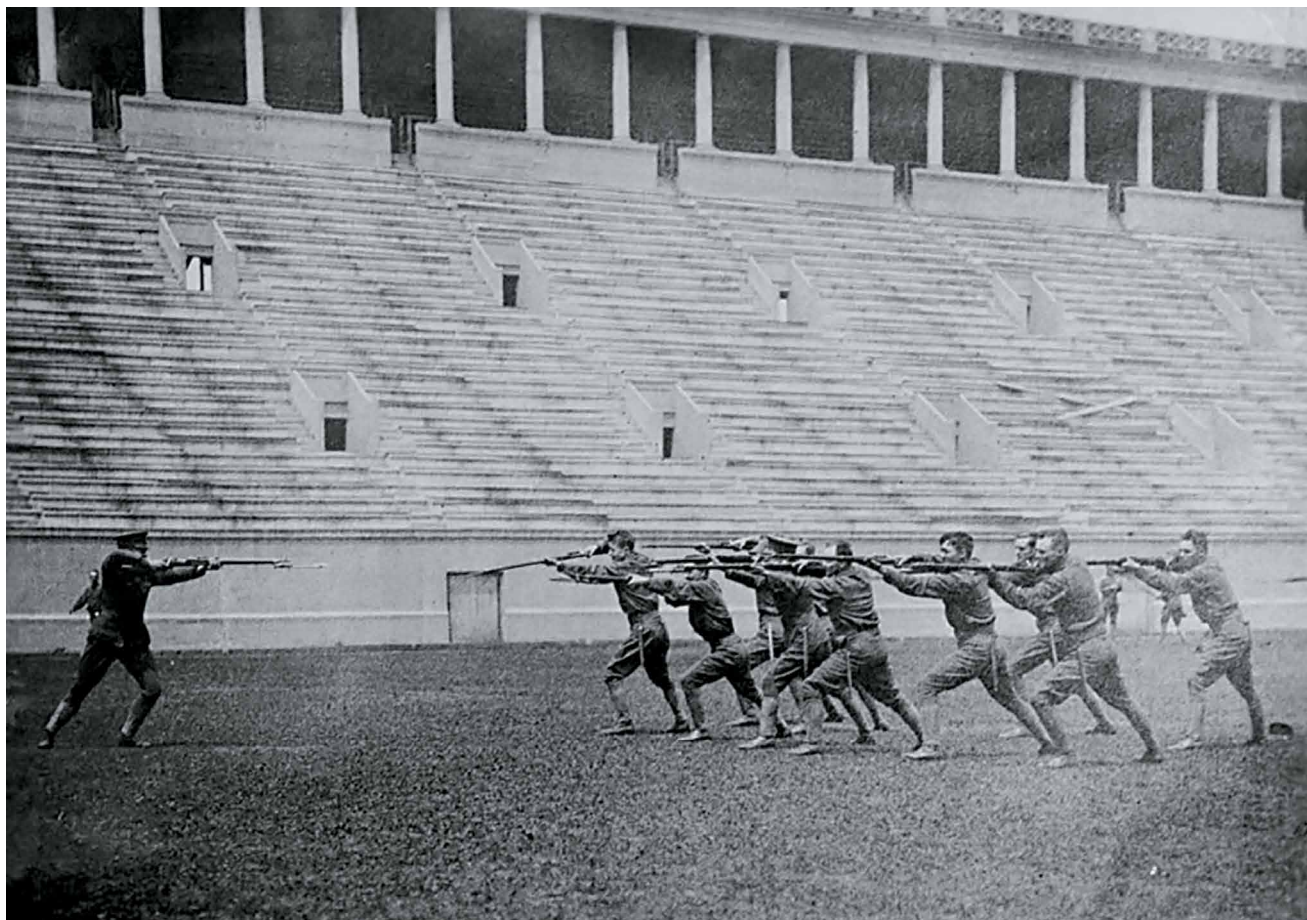
emphasizing skills needed for longer term, more general application.⁸ Over time, the specific skills addressed in precommissioning training lost relevance in the face of real world application and actual experience. Instead of skills training, feedback from deployed junior officers suggests precommissioning should emphasize the metacompetencies of self-awareness and adaptability.⁹ In order to address these competencies, long-used Cadet Command models must change.

Cadet Command and Historical Tensions

Since the ROTC Vitalization Act of 1964, Cadet Command has followed a relatively stable model in educating a large portion of the officer corps.¹⁰ Through nearly five decades, Cadet Command emphasized the use of tactical training as the principal vehicle to drive leader development. Cadet training and education operated in parallel to attainment of a baccalaureate education at a cadet’s respective college. The passage of the Vitalization Act cemented the distinction between training and education in military science programs on college campuses. The act was a culmination of a struggle that raged between college administrators and military leaders through the 1950s.

The sources of this friction were college administrators and educators who were horrified that Army ROTC training, which emphasized tactical skill training and marching drill led by uniformed officers, was granted the equivalency of a college-level course.¹¹ Consequently, many colleges through the 1950s and early 1960s established programs that substituted courses taught by civilian professors for the usual courses specified in the military science curriculum. Civilian faculty and ROTC cadre created many of these substitution programs as part of local agreements.

However, objecting to the impact this “civilianization” could have on the officer corps, the Department of Defense pushed through the Vitalization Act to end the substitution practice, among other changes. Military practitioners resisted the substitutions, arguing that skill-and-task training was the essential component of junior officer training. Essentially, military professionals asserted that the ROTC program existed primarily to provide the Army with competent platoon leaders upon commissioning. This short-term perspective won out over the competing perspective



that asserted the need for a broader educational emphasis on critical thinking and understanding, self-awareness, and adaptability. Notwithstanding, it drove a permanent wedge between military science programs and educators.¹²

Given the intensive manpower needs of the period together with emerging technological requirements for a possible global war against a conventional Soviet threat, the perspective that emphasized the mass production of junior leaders with practical skills that could be immediately put to use at the platoon level was not without merit. By emphasizing the development of skills within a more technical domain, the Army clearly showed that it valued junior leader professional technical competence over the competing argument for the need to build deep intellectual foundations.

This is a common viewpoint for armies facing an immediate and clearly identified threat.¹³ Specific domain knowledge and application are more highly prized when there is clear benefit for application against immediate threats in known conditions. However, the perceived importance of broader education aside from

Harvard University ROTC bayonet drill, ca. 1917–1918. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

technical military skills proficiency in the face of more uncertain conditions was not entirely lost. The fact that the Army maintained the necessity for attaining a college degree as a prerequisite for earning an officer's commission indicated a view that a broader education was recognized as a valuable component of an officer's long-term preparation and professional development.

ROTC's Evolving Approach

As we enter a new period in the evolution of warfare, it is time to reexamine the issue. In previous debates, the Army recognized that earning a degree displays a requisite level of ambition, determination, and problem-solving skills for a leader.¹⁴ As military theorist Morris Janowicz opined, the U.S. Army has always sought to balance its three perceived roles for officers in American society; namely, those of the heroic leader, military manager, and military technologist.¹⁵



However, employing Janowicz's observation as an instrument of analysis, military science programs appear to have become somewhat dated because they have stayed too narrowly focused on developing the heroic leader by emphasizing above all else mastery of technical and tactical skills. In contrast, Janowicz envisioned a future of war that requires the development of a much more diverse set of skills. This is consonant with the AOC assessment, which supports the view that officer education must address the imbalance highlighted in Janowicz's vision to broaden cadet development in other areas.

A readily available way to measure what Army ROTC values in its officer candidates is through the recent version of the order of merit list (OML) used to designate the basic branch of candidates as they access into the officer corps. Studying the OML is useful as it provides a measure of the desired outcomes for each cadet and how he or she would be placed in the Army's structure. The OML model awards cadets up to a total of one hundred points across three categories—academic, leadership, and fitness. Individual cadet scores across these general

1st Lt. Brendan Duke, Fort Carson, Colorado, briefs cadets in the Cadet Leader Course during Center for the Army Profession and Ethic vignettes training 15 June 2016 at Fort Knox, Kentucky. (Photo by Wenqing Yan)

categories are used to rank order cadets nationally and then distribute them across basic branches in accordance with the needs of the Army, cadet preferences, and quality distribution.

Formerly, in this model, a cadet's grade point average (GPA) determined 40 percent of the individual score, while performance at the Leadership Development and Assessment Course (LDAC) determined an additional 25 percent. On-campus physical fitness tests, cadre evaluations, and extracurricular activities made up the balance of the score. This model measured academic performance through a non-normalized GPA and on evaluation of cadets over a twenty-eight-day period performing tactically and technically specific tasks. To a large degree, this model indirectly encouraged two behaviors; namely, seek "the grade" over learning on campus, and study for "the test" at LDAC. Both of these behaviors stemmed from

an apparent institutional emphasis on valuing short-term gain over longer-term learning.

Though changing the accessions OML model might not necessarily address the underlying issues related to preparing adaptive leaders, it would realign assessments to the desired outcomes. This is the direction that Cadet Command is moving.

emphasizes results over process and procedures.¹⁷ Vandergriff stresses that it is not domain-specific knowledge that wins the day for a leader, but rather a broad experiential base, contextual knowledge, and decisiveness.¹⁸

The work of social scientist Mark Moyer appears to corroborate these attributes through his analysis



New Attributes and New Ways

Aligning the Cadet Command leader development and assessment model to what the AOC demands involves a reorientation of the enterprise. It is a change that would move away from rote learning of the familiar toward development of a challenging course that promotes effective problem orientation, critical thinking, and decision making. Using Bloom's educational objectives taxonomy as a reference, cadet education-and-development programs must move beyond just exercises in remembering, understanding, and applying predetermined drills and school solutions toward analyzing, evaluating, and creating in the face of information gaps and uncertainty characteristic of the new security environment.¹⁶

To achieve this orientation, noted leader-development educator Donald Vandergriff stresses an outcomes-based training-and-education model that

Retired Maj. Gen. Burn Loeffke instructs Army ROTC cadets in advanced Spanish language training and medical translation 7 May 2013 at Fort Knox, Kentucky. The training was in preparation for a humanitarian aid mission to Panama in December 2013. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Army ROTC)

of effective leaders on modern battlefields. In his research involving leaders from Iraq and Afghanistan, he notes ten attributes are recurring themes among successful small-unit leaders. These attributes are initiative, flexibility, creativeness, judgment, empathy, charisma, sociability, dedication, integrity, and organization.¹⁹ The application of these leadership principles used in applying doctrine or domain knowledge made small units effective.

The two sets of mutually supporting theoretical observations by Vandergriff and Moyer come together in the Asymmetric Warfare Group's (AWG's)

“21st Century Soldier Competencies,” and the Cadet Command applies the AWG approach to its current developmental models. The soldier competencies Cadet Command strives to promote include character and accountability, comprehensive fitness, adaptability and initiative, lifelong learner, teamwork and collaboration, communication and engagement, cultural competence, and tactical and technical competence.²⁰ Additionally, these skills are being measured in new ways and are reflected differently in the accessions process.

Cadet Command continues the transformation of its education and leader-development approach by applying the concepts noted. In 2016, Cadet Command reconceptualized the OML as an outcomes metrics list, modifying the measurement tool to better reflect the desired outcomes for cadets. The new OML now more objectively measures educational preparedness and de-emphasizes summer camp performance. Though GPA still accounts for 25 percent of the overall score, there is now a broader evaluation employing objective assessments. Cadets must now take two different standardized college education assessment tests (the Collegiate Level Assessment Test and the Miller Analogy Test) that account for 10 percent of their OML score. The command determines an additional 10 percent of the academic score by awarding additional points to cadets pursuing science, technology, engineering, and medical (STEM) degrees.

These new criteria normalize the GPA input and incentivize students to meet the Army’s demand for more STEM-educated officers to serve in technically specific fields beginning in their seventh year of service. LDAC evaluations are now no longer part of the accessions score, with campus-based leadership assessments providing the basis for leadership assessment. The new accessions model will also consider extracurricular activities and reward participation in cultural and language programs.

These changes do not remove the importance of summer camps. Beginning in the summer of 2016, all cadets must now complete a Cadet Individual Education and Training (CIET) program (now referred to as the Basic Camp) following their freshman or sophomore year and the Cadet Leader Course (CLC, now referred to as the Advanced

Camp) between their junior and senior year. Cadet Command designed these programs to transfer the bulk of domain-specific training to summer periods and focus on more general education goals and leader-development tasks on campus. Certainly, leader education and development continue through CIET and CLC, but they are now within a basic skills and tactical framework and are not measured only on the efficient execution of technical tasks. The sum of these changes signifies a significant shift in emphasis from task-based learning to education-based development and evaluation.

Momentum for Additional Change

Redesign of the accessions model and OML process can only be the beginning. These steps assist with measuring the outputs of the program; inputs, ways, and approaches are equally important. Cadet Command must also more aggressively compete to attract, recruit, and retain young citizens with high levels of demonstrated potential across the academic, athletic, and leadership domains. Also, it must update the way it prepares and resources cadre to educate officer candidates in ways that develop them into the high-quality officers the Army needs.

Cadet Command will take a large step in this direction by formalizing its cadre development program, where it will “educate the educators” from across the active and reserve forces in order to implement these updated approaches. It must also enlist and mobilize its partnered educational institutions to take an active part in producing the desired outcomes for its students; namely, relevant college graduates and journeymen military leaders. The challenges are many, but recognizing and acknowledging the intended ends—a leader capable of understanding and thriving in complexity—and reorienting Cadet Command to achieve these ends are the critical first steps. The command is well on its way.

Challenges

Change is seldom easy and never comfortable. But, if the Army is to meet the demands of the future, its leaders must anticipate and be prepared for change. Cadet Command, as the major contributor to the Army’s officer corps, must adapt and change its practices to remain relevant and meet new

operational realities. As with any process of change, the friction associated with moving in a different direction is also present.

Much of the resistance comes from the perspective that this change presents a major departure from a winning formula. However, the Army cannot afford to let tradition stand in the way of progress. Gen. John W. Vessey, in the forward to the 1997 edition of *Once an Eagle* (the classic allegorical tale of U.S. Army

officership), cautioned that tradition, while important to the Army, cannot be taken to extremes where it stunts growth and development. Vessey warned we cannot “worship the ashes” of tradition when former ways have become irrelevant.²¹ Sam Damon, the hero of the novel, declared, “The essence of leadership was an unerring ability to winnow the essential from the trivial or extraneous.”²² In preparing our Army for the future, we must stay focused on the essential. ■

Notes

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