

# **Achieving Leader Development through Strategic Broadening Seminars**

## **The Red Team NCO Education Experience**

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### **Winner – NCO Writing Program**

According to the Army Operating Concept (TRADOC Publication 525-3-1)<sup>1</sup>, the Army must “develop agile, adaptive, and innovative leaders who thrive in conditions of uncertainty and chaos, and are capable of visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing operations in complex environments and against adaptive enemies.” One way the Army is achieving this is through Strategic Broadening Seminars.

For decades the Army has developed leaders through a variety of broadening opportunity programs, fellowships and scholarships. Since 2009, the “Year of the Non-Commissioned Officer,” many of these programs have been made available to non-commissioned officers (NCOs). In January 2016, 44 senior NCOs were selected for the HQDA Strategic Broadening Seminar (HQDA SBS). MILPER Message Number 15-219<sup>2</sup> describes HQDA SBS as an “approved broadening opportunity with the purpose to educate and enhance an appreciation for the complex contemporary security environments. The diverse curriculum and unique characteristics of each SBS host challenge attendees to think critically and creatively.” There are multiple SBS opportunities for which NCOs may compete that include: University of Kansas, University of California- Berkeley, University of Louisville, Executive Counter-Terrorism Studies in Israel, Institute of World Politics in Washington, DC, University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies at Fort Leavenworth, and the Institute for Defense and Business (IDB) conducted at University of North Carolina and Indiana University. Selectees participate in these seminars as part of a diverse cohort which include officers, warrant officers, enlisted, and civilians. Each cohort studies and interacts with world class academics, senior Army leaders, international and interagency partners and business executives in a team-based, small group environment.

In the Army’s “Human Dimension White Paper”<sup>3</sup>, Michael D. Matthews, PhD. describes the Army’s goal as the education of “Soldiers and systems that outthink the enemy, [through] enhanced situational awareness in Soldiers and leaders in order to facilitate rapid and

accurate decisions under stressful conditions with limited decision-making time.” The University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies (UFMCS) Strategic Broadening Seminar is designed to enable soldiers to make these rapid, accurate and enhanced awareness decisions. The UFMCS program provides a unique, tailored approach to education focused on decision support. The program borrows best practices from many disciplines to create a curriculum rich in Red Teaming tools. Students, through experiential and learner-focused education, participate in discussions to develop good decision processes that are essential to improve mission outcomes.

UFMCS defines Red Teaming as a function executed by trained, educated, and practiced team members that provide commanders an independent capability to fully explore alternatives in plans, operations, concepts, organizations, and capabilities in the context of the operational environment and from the perspectives of our partners, adversaries, and others. Throughout the Red Team course, participants are taught essential tools that can assist the command during the decision making process. Red Teaming is a skill that must continuously grow and expand in the individual. Self-awareness, applied critical thinking, groupthink mitigation, and cultural empathy are the four pillars of Red Teaming; these topics lay the foundation of understanding how and why an individual makes decisions and opens the mind to see different possible solutions to a given problem.

Decisions are made at every level, from how early a private shows up to formation, to the plan of attack of the combatant commander. An individual must understand their biases and frames of thinking to fully understand a problem. Whether known or unknown, everyone has biases in their thinking. Likewise, everyone has their own frame of thinking. For example, vision is limited when looking through a window, even when close to the glass. Knowing this and bringing in other individuals with different frames is important to incorporate different ideas.

The seminar began with an introduction by Colonel Steve Rotkoff, USA, Retired, UFMCS Director. Mr Rotkoff provided an overview of the Red Team program and provided historical examples when alternative analysis, or “devil’s advocates,” changed the course of an operation or history. The rest of week one was devoted to self-discovery. The guest speaker, Judah Pollack, who is an author, speaker, and partner at Riverene Leadership, spent three days discussing Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), self-awareness, and Jungian Typology. The class looked at how bias and structured frames limit the ability to think critically. Attendees discussed how to be aware of frames and bias as they interpret the world and make decisions. At the end of the first week, the class took a trip to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, where participants not only discussed how frames and bias affect the way people interpret art, but experienced how individual frames and bias affect the way

participants make decisions, solve problems, or plan a mission.

The second week started with guest speaker, Mrs. Trish Carson, UFMCS lecturer, as she led the class to discovering temperament as an extension of self-discovery and self-awareness. The group learned to identify different personalities within working groups and effective ways to interact with them. Bringing in people with different personalities allows for different perspectives when facing problems or creating courses of action. The week continued with guest speaker Dr. Kate Stewart's lectures on negotiation and mediation. These discussions focused on the importance of understanding what the opposing person or group is saying by avoiding the creation of an argument or rebuttal while someone else is talking. The participants learned methods to use active listening to identify the real interests of the other party in order to know how to best approach the problem. Outcomes learned were the positive results of negotiation which are empathy and open mindedness. The remainder of week two was devoted to readings and discussions of mental models, intuition, and decision making. Understanding the contributors to, and effects of, intuition and patterns in behaviors or activities helped with problem analysis and decision making.

The third week of training was focused on complexity and systems thinking with discussions on cognitive biases, mitigating groupthink and argument deconstruction. In systems thinking, participants learned that everything is connected. When a decision is made it can affect multiple aspects of a mission that may seem to be unrelated to the issue. A small village, for example, is having problems with the sparrows that are destroying their crops and causing severe food shortages. The unit that deploys to the area with a humanitarian mission must think in terms of systems in order to help solve the problem. If they kill off the sparrows in order to save the crops this could cause an imbalance within the food chain that ignites a plague of locusts and destroys the remaining food supply. Everything is connected, so a leader must be able to think in terms of systems in order to understand everything that will be affected by a future decision. In this way, negative effects can be averted or mitigated.

Throughout the course methods to mitigate groupthink were discussed. Examples were shared when, after a meeting at least one person thought, "I should have said something," or in the aftermath of a bad decision someone thought, "I knew that would happen," but in the moment did not want to go against the group's consensus. In this context we reviewed examples of group-think. In the case of the Bay of Pigs in 1961, newly elected President Kennedy is briefed on the plan to invade Cuba in an attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro via "Bahia de Cochinos" (Bay of pigs). As it turns out the invading force of about 1400 was outnumbered, lacked air support, ammunition and an escape route. Planners assumed the invading force could easily maneuver into the mountains from which they could conduct guerrilla operations. Miles of swampland and other factors led to mission failure. At least one

person, presidential advisor Arthur Schlesinger, expressed his concerns on the plan, but was admonished for not supporting the group; other advisors also had doubts but did not voice their concerns for various reasons. Many lessons were learned and as a result “President Kennedy later revised his group decision-making process to encourage dissent and debate. The change helped avert a nuclear catastrophe”<sup>4</sup> during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

To mitigate groupthink a leader should be able to depend on the opinions of others within their staff or section to assist in making decisions. A leader needs to foster an environment that allows for others to explain how a situation or problem can be perceived differently. In this way, a better decision could be found that is not based on one individual’s biases. A leader should have the right people in the right place, not the people who think like they do in order to give the answer that is wanted. A good way to see examples of groupthink and how it can sway decisions is in *The Abilene Paradox*, and *The 12 Angry Men*. Additionally, Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* is a visual example of seeing things in only one way while rejecting the views of others.

The fourth week was focused on cultural awareness and religious studies. The class examined culture and religions beyond the generalities and level of awareness that usually lead to stereotypes and incorrect assumptions. Dr. Andrew Salzmann, Assistant Professor of Theology, hosted the class at Benedictine College and facilitated a seminar discussion where participants used a variety of frameworks to analyze different religions. Using frameworks allowed the group to raise consciousness of cultural differences, understanding that it is appropriate to have several differences, and know when they may or may not apply. Participants achieved the ability to examine a culture without being a regional expert. Understanding the enemy and their culture is critical to winning any battle.

In the fifth and final week, guest lecturer, Dr. Rob B. McClary, seminar leader at UFMCS, facilitated a lesson and several discussions on creativity and innovation. Participants were asked to demonstrate individual examples of creativity and innovation; through divergence, the class compared these examples to the creative thought process. Further activities exposed students to short memory, induction and deduction exercises and how these play a part in the creative process. The course, culminated with student-led activities in deconstructing, Red Teaming, and defining vulnerabilities in the Army Operating Concept and in the white paper, “*Toward a New Offset Strategy*,”<sup>5</sup> by Robert Martinage.

The UFMCS Broadening Seminar makes great leaders better. It is, however, on the individual to reflect on the experiences and themes to determine the best way to apply newly learned concepts. This course better prepares leaders to deconstruct arguments, getting to the real issues and reasoning. NCOs are expected to be tactically and technically proficient, with the complexities of today’s environment they also need to be critical thinkers. Participants are

better prepared to add value and support decision making by challenging assumptions, anticipating cultural perceptions, and identifying groupthink while reducing its effects through mitigating strategies. Selected NCOs need to be experienced and proficient in their fields; these seminars will make them strategic thinkers and better prepared to advise commanders in complex or ambiguous situations. The SBS, and specifically the UFMCS Red Team Member Course, prepares NCOs to think critically, and provides participants the tools and frameworks to address problems objectively, which is of value to any leader. While strategic thinking is necessary at all levels, what an NCO is capable of influencing differs with the situation. What can be focused on, however, is the 15% that an NCO has influence over. Even in a culture such as the U.S. Army, with multiple regulations and strict command structures, each NCO, Red Teamer, and strategic thinker who has been exposed to such SBS programs can influence their organization in a positive manner.

## Endnotes

1. United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, "The U.S. Army Operating Concept – Win in a Complex World" *Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet 525-3-1*, (2014): 32.
2. United States Army Human Resources Command, "Military Personnel (MILPER) Message 219" (2015): Accessed March 10, 2016. <https://www.hrc.army.mil/Milper/15-219> (<https://www.hrc.army.mil/Milper/15-219>)
3. United States Army Combined Arms Center, "The Human Dimension White Paper – A Framework for Optimizing Human Performance", (2014): 14.
4. Wright, Rusty. "JFK and Groupthink: Lessons in Decision Making", *Probe Ministries*, (2003): Accessed March 10, 2016. <https://www.probe.org/jfk-and-groupthink-lessons-in-decision-making/> (<https://www.probe.org/jfk-and-groupthink-lessons-in-decision-making/>)
5. Martinage, Robert. "Toward a New Offset Strategy: Exploiting U.S. Long-Term Advantages to Restore U.S. Global Power Projection Capability", *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA)*, (2014): Accessed March 4, 2016. <http://csbaonline.org/publications/2014/10/toward-a-new-offset-strategy-exploiting-u-s-long-term-advantages-to-restore-u-s-global-power-projection-capability/> (<http://csbaonline.org/publications/2014/10/toward-a-new-offset-strategy-exploiting-u-s-long-term-advantages-to-restore-u-s-global-power-projection-capability/>)

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Both NCOs are recent graduates of the Red Team Member Course (RTMC) as part of the Strategic Broadening Seminars (SBS). When MILPER Message 15-219 was published very little information was available on specifics of the seminars or academic requirements. Further research determined that no information was available from a participant perspective. During the course Roberts and Rivera discussed the need to increase awareness across the NCO Corps on both the SBS and the RTMC. This article is a joint effort to address background information, doctrinal guidance, and topics covered in the seminar. The authors hope to increase awareness, interest, and NCO participation in the SBS, making the force smarter and more capable.