



Class of 2027 cadets march on the Plain, marking their acceptance into the Corps of Cadets during Acceptance Day Aug. 12, 2023, at the U.S. Military Academy. West Point NCOs lead, train, and develop the Army and the nation's future officers. Their title needs to reflect that responsibility. (U.S. Army photo by Jorge Garcia)

# Don't Admire the Problem, Fix It!

By *Command Sgt. Maj. Phil K. Barretto*

U.S. Military Academy at West Point

**W**hen I finished my time as a platoon sergeant, I received a call from Human Resources Command (HRC) about a new assignment. The branch manager told me, "I have a good assignment for you — tactical NCO at West Point."

My immediate reaction was simple: *What is that?* I'd never heard of the position, so I researched it quickly and then asked, "Is this a broadening assignment? Is this a promoting assignment?" The answer was not what I wanted to hear.

So, I asked the other question that was on my mind: *Why are you calling me about something that doesn't align with my career goals?*

Over the following weeks, HRC continued calling about the tactical NCO position. I told them repeatedly that the title wasn't listed in any Army regulation or doctrine. Finally, the branch manager mentioned something that stuck with me — a West Point graduate

had specifically recommended me, believing I could positively influence future Army officers.

Even with that endorsement, I turned the assignment down a fourth time.

## A New Chapter Begins

Fast forward to 2022. I was being interviewed for a three star nominative position — Command Sergeant Major of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. I was humbled when selected by a general officer with whom I'd served before, a leader of tremendous character, a warrior, and a Soldier's general.

In March 2023, I reported to West Point. After completing my 100 day assessment, I sat down with the superintendent and outlined the items I believed required my immediate leadership attention. Priority #1 was fixing the table of distribution and allowances (TDA) title for senior NCOs.

I shared the tactical NCO story which stayed with me for years — it's not a doctrinally recognized position, and NCOs deserve proper recognition for the vital missions they perform.

He listened, understood, and gave me the green light.



When I finished my time as a platoon sergeant, I received a call from Human Resources Command (HRC) about a new assignment. The branch manager told me, "I have a good assignment for you — tactical NCO at West Point." (Alaska National Guard photo by Alejandro Peña)

## Identifying the Problem and Owning the Solution

I knew this wouldn't be easy, but it mattered. How could an institution founded in 1802 — one that has produced generations of Army leaders — operate with a TDA title for NCOs that doesn't exist anywhere in Army doctrine? How could we expect to recruit, develop, and retain the right NCOs when their role wasn't formally defined or aligned with the responsibilities we demanded of them?

West Point NCOs lead, train, and develop the Army and the nation's future officers. Their title needs to reflect that responsibility.

Within six months, after coordinating, researching, and working with teams from across the Academy, we

Cadet Field Training I cadets build strength and confidence by conquering the water confidence course and the Marne Confidence Course June 5, 2025, in Camp Buckner, West Point, New York. Within six months, after coordinating, researching, and working with teams from across the Academy, the TDA title officially changed from tactical NCO to military science instructor (MSI). (U.S. Army photo by Eric Bartelt)



officially changed the TDA title from tactical NCO to military science instructor (MSI).

This wasn't just a new name. It was an acknowledgement of the professionalism, talent, and impact of the NCOs assigned to West Point. It also meant something else: the Army now designates West Point senior NCO assignments as both broadening and career enhancing.

## The Impact

So, is everything perfect for NCOs at West Point now? The answer is no! Nothing will ever be perfect for NCOs who strive to be better every day. But they're promoted faster than I imagined.

That's not by accident.

It's a result of aligning their roles with doctrine, matching their responsibilities with the correct title, and ensuring the Army sees their work for what it truly is: critical to developing our nation's future leaders.

## Closing

This journey taught me something powerful: sometimes the assignment you don't want, don't understand, or don't think fits your path can be the one that shapes your entire career and leaves a lasting impact on the Army.

It also reinforced a simple truth — if something doesn't make sense, if something isn't aligned with standards or doctrine, we fix it! We don't walk past the problem. We don't wait for someone else to take it on. Leaders step up, identify the issue, and drive the solution.

That's what I expect from myself!

That's what I expect from my cadets!

That's what I expect from every leader in our formation!

And that's what right looks like! ■



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