

# Redress of Professional Military Education The Clarion Call

In 1908, the American short story writer O. Henry penned “The Clarion Call.” This title has become synonymous with a powerful request for action or an irresistible mandate. As the Nation looks to the institution of the U.S. Army during an era of persistent conflict and after 9 years of war, it is time to recapture professional military education (PME) as part of our profession.

The Army is arguably the largest and best educational and training institution in the United States. It has a strong, established

educational program that seeks to provide the right Soldier with the right education at the right time. Without doubt, even as we have fought two wars, there have been laudable advances to include an expanded graduate school program, increased numbers of international fellows at our schools, and an effort led by the Chief of Staff of the Army to broaden the experiences of the officer corps with more opportunities to serve in think tanks, interagency positions, and world-class universities.

For the officer corps, this PME program is ingrained from precommissioning through promotion to general officer. Unfortunately, even with the advances mentioned above, what is presented in official policy as an espoused value does not always translate into what is valued within the Army in the real world. More importantly, the gap between espoused and enacted values is significant and growing. Without action to arrest this trend, the Army risks the professional development of its senior leaders as well as its competency

By CHARLES D. ALLEN



Chairman addresses faculty and students at U.S. Army Command and General Staff College

as a force to meet the Nation's needs in the years ahead.

Developing promising senior and strategic leaders is an obligation of the military profession. At a recent Military Education Coordination Council meeting in Washington, DC, several uniformed members asked questions about the types of conflict that we should prepare our senior officers for. In the contemporary operating environment, the focus has understandably been on the curriculum within the colleges: what is taught, how it is delivered, and by whom (faculty) in order to provide relevant education to senior officers. Two essays from the National War College and Naval War College, respectively, captured the discussion of the joint PME and Service-specific senior PME content and methodology in a recent issue of this journal.<sup>1</sup> As important as curriculum and faculty are, they are moot issues if those officers who have the greatest potential to serve as strategic leaders deem attendance at one of our war colleges unnecessary and are allowed to bypass it.

### Cautions from the Past

Ironically, today's period of persistent conflict loosely parallels that of another time, when the Army was under a different kind of stress. The post-Vietnam era found the Army searching for identity within not only itself but also the Nation. With the end of the draft in 1973 and the transition to the Volunteer Army, the Service faced a still formidable Soviet threat during the Cold War. As an integral part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the United States was required to provide competent and credible land forces for the defense of Western Europe. While not a "shooting war," the attendant risk and consequences of conflict were extraordinarily high.

Having insufficient numbers of officers to fill company and field grade positions, the Army accelerated promotions. Commanders accepted risk and pressed on to accomplish missions with existing personnel. It was not uncommon to have lieutenants in command of companies, cavalry troops, and artillery batteries as well as captains serving as battalion S3 (responsible for planning, training, and executing tactical plans at the battalion and brigade levels) operations officers rather

than the captains and majors, respectively, authorized to fill these critical company- and battalion-level positions. Those officers, though talented and motivated to lead, did not have the full benefit of what has become known as the pillars of leader development: experience, training, and education.

In those difficult days, company, troop, and battery commanders routinely assumed the responsibilities of command without attending the officers' advanced courses. S3s did so before attending the Command and General Staff College, where they were to learn and develop such competencies. One of the great lessons of this period was that this formal process better prepared future leaders and was worth the investment in time, money, and infrastructure.

---

*officers did not have the full benefit of what has become known as the pillars of leader development: experience, training, and education*

---

It was the clarion call of the "Hollow Army" that Army Chief of Staff General E.C. Myers testified about to Congress in 1980. That phrase brought attention to an over-structured force that exhibited the symptoms of being inadequately equipped, undermanned, and lacking trained and educated leaders. To address the leader development problem, the Army instituted a program of professional military education and a specific subcomponent for its officers within the Officer Education System (OES). The goal of these initiatives was to prepare officers for future assignments by providing knowledge, developing essential skills and competencies, and motivating lifelong learning. Army policy shaped practice to ensure that officers met OES requirements before assuming company-level command or branch-qualifying positions as field grade officers.

Perhaps most importantly, the Army set clear guidance and established specific policy regarding the management of talent in its ranks. Those officers with the potential to advance were required to attend school, encouraged in their studies, and allowed the necessary time. Put another way, those who attended school were those who *should* be attending, not merely those who were *available* to attend.

After experiencing another crisis of professional identity during the drawdown following Operation *Desert Storm* in the 1990s, Chief of Staff General Gordon Sullivan sounded the clarion call of "No More Task Force Smiths!" Task Force Smith was the first Army unit to engage in combat in the Korean War. As part of the constabulary force in Japan, it was woefully unprepared for combat with its minimal levels of equipment, manning, and training. General Sullivan was concerned that complacency and lack of focus would jeopardize the Army's ability to accomplish its mission: to fight and win the Nation's wars. Without a clearly defined threat and with great uncertainty regarding military capabilities required for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Service leaders undertook several initiatives to develop programs for the Army of the future.

In 1998, Army Chief of Staff General Dennis Reimer implemented Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) XXI (now referred to as OPMS) to balance the needs of the force in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the aspirations and developmental requirements of the officer corps. A critical subsystem of OPMS was officer development. Each branch, functional area, and officer skill proponent defined the appropriate mix of education, training, and sequential, progressive assignments needed by the officer corps for their branch at each grade.<sup>2</sup> This has been the essence of talent management for a force required to identify, develop, properly utilize, and retain its best and brightest officers.

### Current Challenges

The Army of 2010 finds itself with similar challenges: how to provide units and organizations with knowledgeable leaders who are capable of ensuring success. This is especially difficult when faced with the requirements to support the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) model in the current operating environment. It is critical that the Army balance the immediate need for officers in the operational force with the longer term imperative to develop the senior officers who will lead and shape the future Army. Those senior officers should necessarily be a product of a senior level college (SLC) experience. To do otherwise harkens to the assignment and education practices with junior officers of the Hollow Army.

Some may challenge the assertion that the current process is not providing officers capable of succeeding at the strategic level. Clearly, some defense analysts and advisors as

---

**Colonel Charles D. Allen, USA (Ret.), is Professor of Cultural Science in the Department of Command, Leadership, and Management at the U.S. Army War College.**



GEN Martin E. Dempsey, commander, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, delivers comments at College of the American Soldier conference

U.S. Army (Angelica Golindano)

well as Members of Congress in their oversight role have made that assessment.<sup>3</sup> Such are the findings of a recent congressional House Armed Services Committee study of professional military education. The Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee conveyed that “officers are serving in joint and service staff assignments without adequate educational preparation” and that “some operational commanders, including the Combatant Commanders, reportedly consider their staff officers lacking in certain critical abilities necessary to perform their jobs effectively.”<sup>4</sup>

An expected challenge would be to question the value of senior level colleges as well as intermediate schools for those officers identified as high performers and possessing exceptional potential. If these officers are obviously talented and proven under the stresses of demanding assignments, it is worth asking what evidence exists that our schools would make them better. To answer such questions, the U.S. Army War College (USAWC) conducts a biennial survey of general officers who receive its graduates. According to the 2008 survey:

*Almost overwhelmingly, respondents indicated that USAWC graduates were well prepared to work in the strategic environment*

*(96%). Further, they were prepared to address and plan for the future while executing in the present (96%) and prepared to address problems with no clear-cut solutions (96%). Respondents thought USAWC graduates were well prepared for senior officer assignments (97%). . . . The overwhelming majority of respondents (99%) said they would recommend attending the USAWC to officers in their commands.*<sup>5</sup>

While it may be the case that high performing officers could be successful regardless of whether they attend a senior level college,

---

*if officers are obviously talented and proven under the stresses of demanding assignments, it is worth asking what evidence exists that our schools would make them better*

---

it is difficult to dismiss the value of education in preparing for strategic level responsibilities. As additional evidence to support this claim, it is useful to remind ourselves of the role of continuing education in a myriad of professions—medicine, law, education, science, and public administration. It is therefore compelling that military professionals would benefit from advanced education, which places extensive training and experience in context and

develops the faculty for judgment in ambiguous environments.

We have learned from the experiences of the 1970s, 1980s, and now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that education is essential for developing officers and that timing the delivery of education assists in the development of competencies that ensure better performance in assignments requiring those abilities. It is important then to examine how these lessons are reflected in the current practices and culture of the Army. Much has been written about culture in recent studies. Organization theorist Edgar Schein’s definition of *culture*

seems appropriate: “A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems . . . that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.”<sup>6</sup>

Following the Army’s participation in nearly a decade of simultaneous and continuous operations, the policies of OPMS were



revised, and its implementation dramatically altered the demographics of SLC selectees and student body. Previously, the majority of selectees were from the combat arms branch, many having already served successfully as battalion commanders. To meet the intent of OPMS, Army policy modified this composition of SLC cohorts to provide a broader mix of officers from various career fields (for example, operations, operational support, and institutional support). Hence, traditional combat arms battalion commanders (now the minority attendees) share the SLC educational experience with other highly qualified officers from varied disciplines. In its latest policy for officer development, the Army directs senior Service college education for those who:

*occup[y] a leadership position (both command and staff) that requires a thorough knowledge of strategy and the art and science of developing and using instruments of national power (diplomatic, economic, military, and informational) during peace and war. This knowledge is necessary in order to perform Army, Joint, or Defense Agency operations at the strategic level.<sup>7</sup>*

### The “New Normal”

Further examination reveals a subtle but significant shift in the demographics of Active component Army students attending SLC in the years since 2001. While one former Army War College commandant noted that the Army was “too busy to learn,” the issue is more insidious.<sup>8</sup> Today, promising leaders have learned through professional observation that SLC attendance is considered a luxury for high performing officers. Battalion commanders are routinely serving in excess of 30 months in command of deploying and deployed units. The most successful commanders are then “rewarded” with key billet assignments and positions in a combatant command, joint task force, or Army Service Component Command headquarters that they are wont to accept. Understandably, these officers are counseled by leaders and mentors to stay in the fight and seek assignments that will prepare them for future promotion and command—to go for “the brass ring.”

Similar to the Volunteer Army of the 1970s when inexperienced junior officers were company commanders and battalion staff members, senior officers (lieutenant colonels

and above) today are assuming duties and responsibilities for which the Army has failed to provide them the requisite education for professional development. Remembering the contemporary survey of general officers, the author contends that officers with SLC experience are better prepared to face the challenges of senior and strategic leadership.

It is conventional wisdom among Army officers that it is more important to have made the “quality cut” evidenced by selection for a senior level college than to actually attend. This belief has become part of the culture, and it is now common practice that officers will defer attendance during the designated year of selection for senior level PME. Unless the officers do attend or have completed the 10-week Joint Professional Military Education

---

*it is conventional wisdom among Army officers that it is more important to have made the “quality cut” for a senior level college than to actually attend*

---



ROTC members of class of 2010 take oath of office at Florida A&M University commencement

DOD (Chad J. McNeeley)

II course at Joint Forces Staff College, these high performers will not be legally eligible for flag ranks. The Army, therefore, will further restrict the bench from which its most senior leaders are drawn. The trend over the past 5 years shows that 50 percent of the principals will choose to defer, delaying an officer's attendance by an average of 2 years. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 Senior Level College selection list included officers with 4 and 5 years of deferrals, and the average age of Active-duty selectees exceeded 46 years of age in 2009. Given that the average SLC officer will graduate with 23 years of service and the majority of colonels will retire at the 26-year mark, this allows only 3 years, or one assignment, to use the strategic education gained from the SLC experience.

### Culture of Deferral

The office that manages Army senior officer assignments categorizes the reasons for deferral as either policy or discretionary. Policy deferrals are accepted by the institution as the cost of doing business for a nation and an Army at war. Operational requirements to support joint and operational staffs or to meet Department of the Army priorities make up the preponderance of these deferrals. By-name deferral requests from general officers in tactical, operational, and strategic level organizations are approved to support the "warfighters." What the military resisted in 2005 during Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's "snowflake" query about curtailing PME during a time of demand on the Armed Forces has become the "new normal" for many of our best officers. Army policies designed to support force generation requirements have the consequence of delaying the education of officers whose contributions would be most valuable at the strategic level.

While the majority of deferrals are routinely approved in accordance with policy decisions, about 10 percent are discretionary for either personal or extenuating circumstances. Before we decry personal desires, it is important to understand the impact of 9 years of war and the attendant deployments on the officer corps. Since 2001, the operational force has maintained a grueling pace, with many Soldiers having a minimum of two combat deployments—some have more. Operational commanders naturally seek to build and maintain effective units with leaders whom they know and trust. This has resulted in officers remaining in command well beyond

the old standard of 24 months to see units through the preparation and deployment for operational missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. An unintended consequence of "rewarding" officers with extended command time and key assignments is that a number choose to decline SLC attendance and consideration for command. While these numbers are relatively low, we should rightly consider this a harbinger of things to come when the "best and brightest" no longer compete.

Demographics of USAWC students reflect that more than 25 percent of the resident attendees are "geographical bachelors"—students who do not bring their families with them so as to lessen impact on spouses and children. Given the pace of deployments, it is reasonable that officers do not want another year of separation from their families. This is especially salient when the likelihood of additional deployment within 2 years of graduation is relatively high. There is further anecdotal evidence to suggest that officers request discretionary deferrals while waiting to see if they are selected for promotion to colonel or, for those with the highest potential, selection for colonel-level command. Once selected, there are limited incentives to attend SLC, given the belief that officers have already "made it." This is another indicator that officer attitudes related to deferrals are reinforced as the practice has "worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, [is] to be taught . . . as the correct way"<sup>9</sup> and inculcated as part of the culture.

### Class Composition: Canary in the Mine

Trends during past years are informative. There were approximately 240 deferrals granted for the 641 FY09 SLC selectees across the various colleges and fellowships, with 27 officers declining attendance or choosing to retire. With 50 percent of the principal selectees deferring over the past 5 years, a recurring backlog of more than 250 officers exists. This has a significant impact on the composition of the USAWC student body. Alternates activated for senior level college cannot defer. They either attend the USAWC or decline with prejudice. In rare cases, an alternate selectee may attend another SLC venue, but the current policy assigns them to the USAWC to fill vacant seats.

In recent years, the final slate for the USAWC continued to adjust until late June. For the 2009–2010 academic year (AY10), the USAWC slate for Active Component Army

officers changed by 33 percent from May 2009 until the class arrived in mid-July 2009. Additionally, 41 of the 155 Active Component students (26 percent) of AY10 were alternates. While this number has improved from 44 percent in 2009, the trend is consistent for May 2010 with over 60 of 185 (32 percent) student changes in the USAWC AY11 slate. These last-minute slating changes and the scramble to identify replacement students continue to create considerable turbulence. The impact is especially significant for the USAWC, where Active Component officer alternates, Army Reserve, Army National Guard officers, and government civilians fill vacant seats.

The last-minute slating of officers also dramatically affects the branch representation in the USAWC seminars. Under current policy, Active Component deferrals are replaced not by an alternate from the same branch or functional area, but by the next officer on the order of merit list. For AY10, out of a class of 338 students, there were only 3 armor officers and 13 infantry officers. These numbers mean that there were not enough ground maneuver officers to allocate one for each of the 20 seminars. This absence of a ground maneuver perspective may have an adverse effect on seminar learning in the topic areas of land power development and employment.

### PME Is Out of Balance

In a number of forums over the past 2 years, Army Chief of Staff General George Casey has used the term *out of balance* to communicate his concern for the well-being of a force that is deploying frequently with little dwell time between operational missions. While this metaphor aptly describes General Casey's assessment of the condition of Soldiers and their families, it also serves to highlight that professional military education is out of balance with the experience and training that our officers have garnered from numerous deployments. With the expectation of persistent conflict for the foreseeable future, it is now time to regain the balance between the educational development of senior leaders and the requirement of operational deployments. It is imperative to recapture that part of our profession so important to the growth of leaders who, in 6 to 10 years, will be charged with leading the military and advising senior government officials. A more appropriate balance of the two provides a greater



opportunity to prepare our leaders for service at the strategic level.

We should continue to examine whether the Army is meeting the challenge and responsibility of ensuring that the right officers receive the right education at the right time in their careers. Clearly, there is a pervasive conflict between our espoused and enacted values for attending PME institutions. Senior leaders need to understand the nature and magnitude of the problem. I have attempted to provide illumination and caution about the long-term consequences of this imbalance by observing what is published and what is actually happening within the Army.

In various policy documents and official statements, the Army's senior leaders are saying the right things. Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Leader Development Strategy*, and the Army *Capstone Concept* clearly emphasize the need for high-performing leaders who can effectively *lead* their organizations, *develop* themselves and others, and *achieve* organizational goals and missions.

In practice, however, Army personnel (officer and enlisted) are not attending PME as programmed, with an increasingly significant backlog of selectees.

Who bears responsibility? Is it the officer (and prospective student) who has figured out what really is important in an

reminds us that culture is neither right nor wrong, but may be misaligned with the environment. At every level, decisions are made without malice in an attempt to resolve the problem or address the conditions at hand. But such decisions, as history often reminds, result in unintended consequences.

---

*it is time to regain the balance between the educational development of senior leaders and the requirement of operational deployments*

---

Army career? Or is it the senior leader who requests a specific officer, rather than trusting the personnel system, to provide a qualified officer (top 20 percent of the cohort) to a key position on the Army or joint requirement document? Or could it be the institution responsible for balancing the long-term investment in people with the short-term demand for commanders and leaders? Perhaps there is no particular person or organization to hold responsible. Once again, Edgar Schein

### **Realign the Culture**

Just as many are involved and bear some responsibility for current conditions, many must play key parts in resolving this dilemma—it is part of the Army culture that we have to acknowledge while making change a priority. SLC students and senior officers alike view the current condition as a major challenge for the Service. Changing the culture requires the application of Schein's concepts that have demonstrated efficacy.<sup>10</sup>



Secretary Gates speaks to students at U.S. Army War College

U.S. Air Force (Jerry Morrison)

It is important to consider methods that establish the cultural assumptions of what is important for the Army while reinforcing those assumptions.<sup>11</sup> Selection and application of these methods are the responsibility of the Service as the institution, and when properly applied they will modify the behavior and expectations of members of the profession. Appropriately, the first imperative of Army Leader Development Strategy is to “encourage an equal commitment by the institution, by leaders, and by individual members of the profession to life-long learning and development.”<sup>12</sup>

The existing Army culture toward PME (that is, it is more important to be selected than to attend) is a direct result of the policies emplaced to support force generation requirements for a brigade-based force. The culture is reinforced by organizational design and structure (brigade combat team-centric); organizational systems and procedures (ARFORGEN); and formal statements of organizational philosophy (to provide support to warfighters through ARFORGEN). The current effort to realign the culture toward PME has only employed reinforcing methods, which on their own are insufficient to change culture. While senior officer statements claim that leader development is first priority and that the backlog of PME will be reduced, the day-to-day practice, unfortunately, does not reflect those pronouncements.<sup>13</sup> PME attendance is, across all levels of the officer corps, not reflective of the espoused value of education.

Specific application of targeted leader actions is needed to convey to the officer corps that education is a necessary and valued component of leader development. To effectively change the culture, the Army’s behaviors should demonstrate to its members what is important. Key actions are what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis. They are also observed criteria by which leaders allocate scarce resources and select and promote organizational members. Accordingly, Army leaders should track attendance at PME and focus attention to ensure that leaders are receiving relevant education for their professional development. PME venues need to receive resources—scheduled time in an officer’s career, adequate funding and facilities, and most important, quality faculty to provide the best educational experience to students. Finally, the reward of promotion and key billet assignment based on completion of required PME may be the

strongest lever to change the culture. To paraphrase one general officer, “once the path to success passes through [SLC] and not around it, the system will fix itself.”

A variety of factors contributed to PME and, in particular, SLC becoming out of balance. The Army, however, is at a critical point where it needs to acknowledge this imbalance. It needs to make the required changes to be successful in rebalancing the emphasis placed on education to complement the experience and training required of leaders in the modern era. If it fails to do so, it risks allowing the current status of PME to become permanently embedded in the Army culture.

Once again, a look to history provides context. During mobilization for World War II, the U.S. Army War College and the Army Industrial College were discontinued. The analysis of that action seems hauntingly familiar:

*The shortage of officers trained for high staff and command assignment became acute before the first year of the war was over. . . . Corps, armies, theaters, and the War Department were to suffer increasingly from the shortage of staff officers trained for higher levels. It is difficult to state positively that the products of the Army War College and the Army Industrial College would have had a beneficial effect on high level planning during and following the war, but on the basis of the influences of those two schools . . . it is reasonable to infer that their sudden elimination in 1940 was an error of judgment in which the current need for officers was allowed to outweigh the eventual greater need for officers trained for higher staff levels.*<sup>14</sup>

While opportunities for senior PME and attendance at the various SLC venues remain, the parallels of World War II are clear. The clarion may not have sounded yet for the Army of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but we know the tune that it will play; it is professionally imprudent to wait for its mournful notes. **JFQ**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Janet Breslin-Smith and Cliff Krieger, “Strategic Drift? The Future of the National War College,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 55 (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 2009), 14–20; and Derek S. Reveron and James L.

Cook, “Developing Strategists: Translating National Strategy into Theater Strategy,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 55 (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 2009), 21–28.

<sup>2</sup> Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600–3, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, November 1, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> See Andrew F. Krepinevich and Barry D. Watts, *Regaining Strategic Competence* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2009); and John A. Nagl and Brian M. Burton, *Keeping the Edge: Revitalizing America’s Military Officer Corps* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, *Another Crossroads? Professional Military Education Two Decades After the Goldwater-Nichols Act and the Skelton Panel*, Washington, DC, April 2010, xii, xiv.

<sup>5</sup> “2008 U.S. Army War College General Officer Survey,” Carlisle Barracks, PA, U.S. Army War College, Executive Summary.

<sup>6</sup> Edgar Schein, “Organizational Culture and Leadership,” in *Classics of Organization Theory*, ed. Jay Shafritz and J. Steven Ott (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt College Publishers, 2001), 373–374.

<sup>7</sup> DA PAM 600–3, 29.

<sup>8</sup> Robert H. Scales, “Too Busy to Learn,” *Proceedings* 136, no. 2/1 (February 2010), 284, available at <[www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/story.asp?STORY\\_ID=2195](http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/story.asp?STORY_ID=2195)>.

<sup>9</sup> Again from the organizational culture definition by Schein, 373–374.

<sup>10</sup> The concepts are reinforcing and embedding mechanisms. See Schein, 228–253.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen J. Gerras, Leonard Wong, and Charles D. Allen, “Organizational Culture: Applying a Hybrid Model to the U.S. Army,” in *Strategic Leadership: Selected Readings AY2010* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, November 2009), 130.

<sup>12</sup> *A Leader Development Strategy for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Army* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, November 25, 2009), 10.

<sup>13</sup> See Martin E. Dempsey, “Building Balance and Versatility for a Campaign-Quality, Expeditionary Army,” *Army* 59, no. 10 (October 2009), 88; and James D. Thurman, “A Balanced Army for the Future Strategic Environment,” *Army* 59, no. 10 (October 2009), 191.

<sup>14</sup> Marvin A. Kreidberg and Merton G. Henry, *History of Military Mobilization in the United States Army, 1775–1945* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1955), 613–614.