

The Hidden Cost of Down-Sizing A Zero Defects and Risk Avoidance Mentality

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THE HIDDEN COST OF DOWN-SIZING
A zero defects and risk avoidance mentality

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of the intense leadership conflict that took place from 1989 to the present day regarding the role of individual initiative versus centralized control. The purpose of this study is twofold. First, to describe and analyze two separate, but related leadership constructs - zero defects and risk avoidance - to trace their origin and rise in the military profession, and finally to examine their impact on today's military. Second, to contribute to an understanding of how this conflict might be resolved and an optimum solution incorporated into our culture and values through the professional military educational and mentoring process.

I contend that the force reduction measures undertaken from 1989 to present, when examined in context with various social, economic, cultural and technological changes in the military specifically, and society in general, resulted in unintended and unwanted consequences in the application of military leadership. Furthermore, these leadership deficiencies have contributed to reductions in overall readiness and morale and recruiting shortfalls.

The paper concludes with the recommendations that the Services reexamine their various educational institutions, focusing on mentoring, communication skills and values. Similarly, that they conduct an examination of doctrinal manuals, evaluation reports, and promotion and command selection boards where the primary focus is on immediate result versus long-term, systemic programs.

INTRODUCTION

The security of every society must always depend, more or less, upon the martial spirit of the great body of the people ... Martial spirit alone, and unsupported by a well-disciplined standing army, would not perhaps, be sufficient for the defense and security of any society. But where every citizen has the spirit of a soldier, a smaller standing army would surely be necessary.

Adam Smith¹

This is a study of the intense leadership conflict that took place from 1989 to the present day regarding the role of individual initiative vis-a-vis centralized control. The purpose of this study is twofold. First, to describe and analyze two separate, but related leadership constructs – zero defects and risk avoidance – to trace their origin and rise in the military profession, and finally to examine their impact, good and bad, on today's military. Second, to contribute to an understanding of how this conflict might be resolved and an optimum solution incorporated into our culture and values through the professional military educational and mentoring process.

On 9 November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, marking the end of the Cold War and initiating a personnel down-sizing process throughout the military, known today as the draw-down, that continues to the present. In many ways, this process simply minored the time-honored tradition of reducing the Armed Forces at the conclusion of a conflict. It was an opportunity to "get the boys home" and help the economy – the so-called peace dividend. Simultaneously, the draw-down would in itself indirectly lead to a more efficient, combat effective force by freeing up personnel dollar savings to conduct modernization and technological improvements. I contend this reduction in force was, in fact, not simply a replay of past reduction measures but because of various social, economic, cultural, and technological

¹Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations*, V, 1776

changes in both the military and society in general, resulted in unintended and unwanted consequences in the application of military leadership.

It should be stated up front that since this is primarily a study of an unexpected consequence of the personnel draw-down, it will neither judge the concluded process nor offer a personnel reduction blueprint of its own. Still, the study will offer the reader sufficient detail and testament of the facts to alert him to the problem and the kinds of considerations that must be taken into account in understanding and developing other reduction proposals now or in the future. On the other hand, it is the author's intention to make the reader acknowledge the seriousness of the current problem, take note of current and potential readiness implications, and hopefully help move their respective Service toward a solution.

The paper is organized into six chapters. Chapter one provides the reader with background and the author's working hypothesis. Chapter two focuses on the first of two constructs - zero defects. Zero defects are the thought processes and actions, both overt and suggestive, in which a leader goes to great lengths to ensure the total absence of defects, mistakes, or flaws within his command to the point that he centralizes all decisions at his level, minimizing or overshadowing subordinates' control. The second construct - risk avoidance - is addressed in chapter three. In this case, the subordinate, realizing or perceiving a cost (penalty) for making a mistake avoids risk taking by either doing nothing or deliberately abdicating the majority of his decisions to his superior. Chapter four points out the importance to the Armed Forces of recognizing and eliminating these negative leadership traits. Here the focus is on leadership responsibilities, individual initiative, decision-making and risk taking, and their personnel effects, now and in the uncertain and challenging future. Chapter five offers some conclusions on the problem in general, and gives the reader a historical perspective on the

conflict and some of its consequences. Finally, chapter six offers some recommendations and potential solutions to this conflict between individual initiative and overly centralized control.

Chapter 1 Background/Hypothesis

It is not big armies that win battles; it is the good ones.

Maurice de Saxe

Mes Reveries, iv, 1732²

Joint Vision 2010 is the conceptual template for how America's armed forces will channel the vitality and innovation of our people and leverage technological opportunities to achieve new levels of effectiveness in joint warfighting. Focused on achieving dominance across the wide range of military operations through the application of new operational concepts, this template provides a common direction for our Services in developing their unique capabilities within a joint framework of doctrine and programs as our nation prepares to meet an uncertain and challenging future.³ In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, the Cold War ended, and our Government and Service leadership made the decision to restructure the armed forces.⁴ The end of the Cold War offered the nation an opportunity to reduce the size of the military. This was a process that had occurred after every major conflict in our history from the Revolutionary War; through the Civil War; two World Wars; Vietnam; and, most recently, DESERT STORM. To the military and civilian designers' credit, this draw-down was to be different. The goal was to conduct a gradual reduction in forces, over an extended period of time. Keeping the numbers sufficiently

² Robert Debs Heinl Jr. Colonel USMC (Ret.), *Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations* (Annapolis, Maryland: United States Naval Institute, 1988), 15

³ Department of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Joint Vision 2010*. Washington, D.C., 1

⁴ "The world has changed profoundly in the last seven [nine] years. However, the design, structure, organization and character of the U.S. military forces have not. America's military has evolved, and what exists now differs in some important respects from what existed at the end of the Cold War - largely as a consequence of downsizing the Cold War force structure." However the numbers have been reduced 40 percent. James R. Blaker, "Understanding the Revolution in Military Affairs," *The Officer*, May 1997, 23. For a more in depth discussion on RMA, see also: *The Revolution in Military Affairs*, Science Applications International Corporation, 1996, 1-21; Michael O'Hanlon, "Can High Technology Bring U.S. Troops Home?" *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1998-99, 72-86; Brian R. Sullivan, "The Future Nature of Conflict: A critique of 'The American Revolution in Military Affairs' in the Era of Jointery,"

high to allow for a maturing force offered many officers and noncommissioned officers the opportunity to continue to serve with an expectation of a full career. On the other hand, for those "career" service members not retained, the opportunities to retire early, or at least be substantially compensated for early termination, were developed. The Services clearly recognized two characteristics of Cold War veterans that distinguished them from their predecessors: first, they were all volunteers, and second, they did not enter the Service "for the duration."⁵ The direct implication of both characteristics is the inherent expectation of the potential to pursue a full career in the military. Despite Service efforts to retain their best people and continue to offer them, and potential recruits, a viable career opportunity, the fact remained, many of those serving throughout the draw-down would not be retained in the military as the draw-down progressed.⁶

In 1989 roughly 2.4 million men and women were in uniform serving their country; today that figure stands at 1.42 million (a 40 percent reduction in force structure) and continues to decline.⁷ While the Services offered a number of "volunteer" reduction programs to reach targeted, end of year personnel figures (early retirement, Selective Separation Bonuses/Variable Separation Incentive (SSB/VSI), etc.) each was concerned, and rightly so, with retaining their

Defense Analysis, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1998, 9 1-100; James K. Morningstar, "Technologies, Doctrine, and Organization for RMA," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Spring 1997, 37-43

⁵ The author's intent is to mark the difference between service members that joined or were drafted in World Wars I and II for the length of the war i.e., until the war's end, and service members that joined during the Cold War. I would also contend, that during an active war (e.g., Korea and Vietnam) a percentage of volunteers entered Service for the duration of the war effort, only.

⁶ Joan Harman, "Army Veterans Recall Their Military Experience," *ARI Newsletter*, (US Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences) Vol. 6, Summer 1996, 18 "Involuntary separations have become more common in recent years due to the military draw-down. In view of this reality, efforts have been increased to assist departing soldiers as they make the transition back to civilian life. This is particularly important because of the substantial numbers involved, and because of the fact that some of those asked to leave planned a career in the military and are, therefore, *strongly* affected by the change in this plan (*Italics added*)."

⁷ William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Reviews* (Washington D.C., Secretary of Defense, May 1997), pg. iv. Additional strength reductions are to be enacted in 1998-1999. Total active duty strength will be reduced to 1,360,000 (down 36 percent from 1989), with 835,000 in the Reserve forces (down 29 percent from 1989). Civilian personnel will decline to 640,000 (down 42 percent from 1989).

best people. In addition to "transition" packages, the Services established qualitative retention measures, such as Reduction In Force (RIF) Boards, Selective Early Retirement Boards (SERBs), and higher standards for promotion and school selection boards. The intent was for the Services to have control over the draw-down yet retain their best-qualified personnel. Using a market analogy of supply and demand – when supply goes down (number of jobs available), demand goes up (competition) – service members recognized the number of jobs were decreasing, opportunities were decreasing, and, if they wanted to stay in the military, they would have to become more competitive.

The bar had been raised. Measures to improve the Services' professionalism, quality of life, and relative job satisfactions were now offset by Service draw down measures, to include: volunteer incentive programs and qualitative retention measures. At the same time, Service efficiency report grades went through a gradual period of inflation,⁹ further adding to individual competitiveness. Finally, as the Services became more ethnically diverse and the number of women in the ranks increased, more and more emphasis was placed on "correctness." Although successful, in the sense that down-sizing resulted in an overall force structure reduction of 40 percent, this combination of factors also led to a number of unintended consequences including: increased competition among service members for retention and promotion opportunities and the need to be better, or at least be seen by their superiors as better, if they wanted to remain in the military.

⁸The later two efforts were undertaken to improve accession and retention and are associated with the advent of the All Volunteer Force; the effort to improve "professionalism" was an effort to fix recognized leadership maladies resulting from the Vietnam War.

⁹In this case, inflation refers to a process where individual evaluations uniformly improved, creating a situation where promotion and other selection boards were forced to rely on relatively minor characteristics to differentiate between selects and non-selects. This phenomenon further highlighted the need for a "mistake free" career. The Air Force recognized the problem first and made changes to their evaluation system in 1992. The Navy made changes to their fitness reporting system in 1996. The Army and the Marine Corps revised their evaluation forms in 1998 and 1999, respectively.

Working Hypothesis

As the military continues to down-size, leaders at all levels, in order to be seen by their superiors as their "top" leaders, are becoming more and more concerned with delivering the "right" answer, producing the "best" statistics, or reporting the "least" problems. To ensure fewer "mistakes" by subordinates, senior level leaders are making "how to" decisions within their subordinate commands or units. Decisions and decision-making authority are continually being abrogated to higher and higher levels. Terms such as zero defects, micro-management, over control, centralization, and careerism - terms that weren't in the military lexicon twenty years ago - are now prevalent. At the same time, junior leaders are recognizing the high cost paid for straying "out of the box." The result is less initiative, more incidents of risk avoidance, and efforts to avoid "mistakes" by consciously avoiding making decisions or elevating their decisions to their superiors. The zero defects and risk avoidance mentality, both actual and perceived, is having deleterious consequences for morale, retention, and overall readiness.

Chapter 2 Zero Defects

I don 't want an officer on my staff who never makes an error or a mistake, because I will strongly suspect that he isn't doing anything or blaming his mistakes on someone else.

*MajGen Oliver P. Smith
United States Marine Corps¹⁰*

By all conventional standards, the draw-down has been a success. Services have reduced their ranks by over one million members, closed over 1000 bases or facilities, freed up trillions of dollars for other national projects,¹¹ and initiated both modernization and doctrinal changes geared to bring us into the twenty-first century.¹² At the same time, we have placed greater demands on our people through increased operational tempo (OPTEMPO),¹³ fewer entry level accessions, less training time, and reduced budgets. Despite these reductions, we remain the best military in the world. But "cracks" are surfacing in our armor;¹⁴ readiness shortfalls are beginning to appear; planes can not fly due to lack of spare parts; contingency operations are affecting primary mission training; more than one-third of all initial-entry service members leave the Service before completion of their first service obligation; and three out of four Services are

¹⁰ Arsned Forces Staff College, Slide on Joint Operations Planning and Execution System (JOPES) briefing.

¹¹ General Dennis Reimer, Chief of Staff, US Army, "Army/Industry Partnering - Preparing for a New Millennium," Speech to Association of the United States Army, Orlando, FL., 15 February 1999. In this speech, General Reimer addressed the figures for the Army alone: Reduced the force 40 percent - 600,000 soldiers and civilians, over 700 bases, \$750 million saving in expenditures, and an Operational Tempo increase of 300 percent.

¹² William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review*, Washington DC: Secretary of Defense, May 1997, ix.

¹³ "The Department of Defense has known that many segments of the force have been, and probably will be, used at a very high operating tempo (OPTEMPO) in peacetime. However, the [Smaller-Scale Contingency Operations] Analysis showed that this phenomenon was not limited to traditional "low density/high demand units that had been identified over the past few years. Many "regular" forces were also in very high demand, including headquarters elements that were generally tasked more heavily than their subordinate forces. While it is no surprise that large, long operations significantly affect OPTEMPO, the studies found that small, long term operations also had a significant impact." Cohen, 23. Bottom line: all the Services are busier than they were ten years ago.

¹⁴ "In an August 1997 press conference, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff acknowledged that there were "cracks" in unit readiness. Quote taken from General Walter F. Ulmer, Jr. "Military Leadership into the 21st Century: Another 'Bridge Too Far?'" *Parameters*, Spring 1998, 5

experiencing recruiting problems.¹⁵ While a zero defects mentality is not the sole cause for all that is currently wrong with the military today (and it is still a great military), it can be demonstrated to be a significant contributing factor.

Until recently, most of the evidence pointing toward a zero defects mentality was anecdotal. The phrase would come up in professional discussions and one officer or noncommissioned officer would relate how a friend or acquaintance had received a bad report, been passed over for promotion, or "gotten out" because of the poor "command climate." But for the most part, it was usually discussed in relation to "someone else" at "another location." Then the concept began appearing in the form of jokes or humorous vignettes¹⁶ but always with the same recurring theme. A recent example being passed over the Internet (Subject: Very Telling) reads: Members of a "West Point class [reunion] assembled the following list of the pros and cons of Army Service." Evidently they threw the pros away. Here are a few extracts from that list:

1. This ain't fun anymore
2. Zero defects environment known as "supervision."
62. Junior officers and NCOs resigning -more than just a good economy.
66. Don't tell me how to suck eggs; tell me you want it done and I'll figure it out.
73. Peers telling me it's bad everywhere -it isn't just me.
86. Two words: political correctness.
90. Tired of trying to make a difference and nobody cares.
94. "It briefs well."
99. You love the Army more than it loves you.
100. The thrill is gone.

Recently however, hard data is beginning to surface, which indicates that the problem is neither humorous nor illusionary. Last year, the Inspector General of the Army, Lieutenant General Larry R. Jordan, in presenting his "State of the Army" Briefing, highlighted the

¹⁵ Lucian K. Truscott, 4th, "A Military Problem Money Can't Solve," *New York Times*, March 2, 1999

following observations taken from soldiers' comments regarding how they feel about today's

Army:

- Some perceive a zero-defect environment and growing careerism
- Growing concern over career satisfaction
- High OPTEMPO/PERTEMPO
- Selected personnel shortages and mission accomplishment through extraordinary efforts¹⁷

The last two themes relate directly to frequent deployments; long hours; personnel shortages; and lack of spare parts, ammunition, and training time. These are the issues making the daily paper, getting the headlines, and being linked directly to readiness. But job security, and more importantly job satisfaction, are also related to readiness. They affect morale, retention, and mission accomplishment. Knowing you've done your job and knowing you've made a contribution are the intangibles that do not necessarily show up on Unit Status Reports (USR) or Status of Resources and Training Systems (SORTS), but are every bit as important to readiness.

In 1996, an Army-wide Command Climate Assessment was conducted focusing on three areas: quality, leader development, and the Army environment. The study found "Army leaders continue to indicate concern that a zero defects climate exists. About 61 percent of Active Component officers and 45 percent of senior noncommissioned officers agreed that the Army was moving toward a zero defects mentality."¹⁸ The study also found that "about 34 percent of

¹⁶ An interesting thing about humor, one of the things that make jokes funny is their potential for believability and their similarity to the "real" world. Remember, "There's a little truth in all humor." (unknown)

¹⁷ briefing conducted at a PERSCOM Officer Professional Development session. Specific comments include: "The demand from above for information is insatiable; Everything is top priority; and Don't know if I can/should recommend a career."

¹⁸ Army Trends Analysis Group, "Army Assessment of Command Climate: An Executive Summary," *U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences*, May 1996, 1-2 The Command Climate Assessment was based on a review of data gathered over the last several years from over 16 different sources - primarily surveys with the number of respondents ranging from about 8000 to 26,000 for each source. The assessment looked at perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of soldiers and Department of the Army Civilians. It cautioned that "It is important to remember that perceptions do not necessarily represent what is actually so. Perceptions reflect personal interpretations and are influenced by formal and informal communications; experiences and training; and those portions of the whole picture that individuals see and hear -and their interpretation of them."

Active Component officers and senior NCOs say that the bold, creative leader cannot survive in today's Army."¹⁹

In 1998, the U.S. Army Research Institute conducted a research project which examined the attitudes and opinions of soldiers who deployed in contingency operations in order to identify issues impacting on unit and individual effectiveness. They found that soldiers during contingency operations judged quality of leadership more critically than while in garrison. Although lessons learned included both favorable and unfavorable leadership qualities, within the latter, micro-management and leader careerism appeared as two of the top four traits.²⁰ One noncommissioned officer summed it up this way, "Unfortunately, many officers micro-managed. They had little faith in the NCO corps, failed to take advice from their NCOs, used little or none of their NCOs' expertise, and basically were looking out for their own welfare and career progression. This greatly affected morale of the units."²¹

Negative comments are not confined to junior enlisted and noncommissioned officers. Cynthia Elezuk's 1996 survey of attitudes and experiences of Active Component Army officers elicited 10,240 responses, 2,440 of which contained write-in comments. The written comments were divided into 21 broad categories, with officers' careers constituting the second largest category, predominantly addressing career uncertainty, "zero defects mentality," and career

¹⁹ Army Trends Analysis Group, May 1996, 2

²⁰ Alma G. Steinberg and Diane M. Foley, "Leaders Guide for Contingency Operations: The Human Dimension," Special Report #36, *United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences*, June 1998, 22. The other two negative traits, as reported by soldiers, were lack of caring for soldiers and unethical behavior by leaders. Specific examples of the over lying trends include: micro-management (e.g., not trusting subordinate leaders to get things done correctly; bypassing the chain of command by going directly to soldiers; telling subordinate leaders both what to do and how to do it; making decisions at a higher level that should be/have been made at a lower level) and leader careerism (e.g., assigning unnecessary tasks to boost the appearance of leader productivity; volunteering for missions to enhance careers; pursuing media attention; creating a dog-and-pony show for higher-ups and VIPs; contributing to a zero-defects environment.)

²¹ Steinberg, 22. Although exact sample size for the study was not given, survey results reflect numerous interviews and surveys of soldiers returning from deployments for Operation Restore/Continue Hope in Somalia, Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti, and Operation Joint Endeavor in Bosnia.

progress relating to "ticket punching." "Numerous comments claimed that a 'Zero Defects Mentality' exists in the Army. In their words, 'The Zero Defects Mentality in the Army is [a] live and well and growing. Officers who keep their mouths shut and don't rock the boat get ahead. Officers who voice their opinion prior to the decision are brushed aside and receive negative report cards (OERs)' and 'the days of letting a young LT or SGT learn a lesson the hard way are over.'"²²

Let us look at what General Charles C. Krulak, Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, said about the zero defects mentality:

The Zero-Defect Mentality is at odds with both effective leadership and effective followership. It is generated by a misunderstanding of the fundamentals of accountability. It is sometimes, in itself, irresponsible. There are times when there is absolutely no room for error. In those instances, detailed guidance followed by thorough supervision is required to ensure the desired results are achieved. Unfortunately, some leaders cannot distinguish between when these measures are required and when they are not. They become micro-managers and are intolerant of mistakes. They expect decisions made by subordinate leaders to mirror, in detail, those, which they would have made. In so doing, they create an environment where subordinates do not grow and leadership development is suppressed. No one dares act beyond what is expressly directed for fear of making a mistake.²³

In these instances, correct decisions become "Doing what the boss said, just the way the boss said to do it." In the absence of intent, subordinates and subordinate leaders are reluctant to ask for general guidance for fear of looking incompetent, or worse, questioning their leaders' directives. They begin to guess what the leader "really" wants. The end result is more work for everyone, including the leader who failed to give the

²² Cynthia E. Elezuk, *1996 Survey on Officer Careers Content Analysis on Written Comments*, Swan Research, Inc. No. DASWOI-97-M-1577 (Arnold, Maryland: Swan Research, Inc., July 1997), 3

²³ General Charles C. Krulak, "Responsibility, Accountability, and the Zero-Defects Mentality," *Marine Corps Gazette*, May 1997, 19

necessary intent or general guidance in the first place. This in turn leads to more work and more detailed guidance.

Hard Data

Recent research has captured more objective data on this phenomenon. Service members believe they are not allowed to fail, not allowed to make mistakes and survive. More importantly, they feel their senior leaders do not trust their judgement or their decision-making abilities. They see themselves being given excellent training; they hear the rhetoric of commitment, competency, and the importance of people and initiative; but their experience is the reality of over- supervision, micro-management, and a no-mistake environment. In short, they believe they are not allowed to make a difference, not allowed to contribute. Lieutenant Melanie Butler, in an article entitled "Why I Will Leave the Navy," summed it up this way:

The most compelling reason for my decision to leave my chosen profession is a *total absence of fun* ... What I mean by "fun" is the passionate enjoyment and fulfillment that comes from doing the work you love. It is the pure, unadulterated satisfaction you feel at the end of a hard day, knowing that you have made a difference in the world.²⁴

Although everyday decision making is not easily measured, one manifestation of zero defects is the escalation of decision-making authority. Decisions are being made at higher and higher levels. Senior leaders are making decisions previously made by subordinates. At one Army installation, non-judicial punishment authority for junior NCOs involving controlled substances was escalated from battalion to brigade-level command.²⁵ In Bosnia, a battalion

²⁴ Melanie C. Butler, "Why I will Leave the Navy," *Proceedings*, April 1999, 2

²⁵ USAIC Supplement 1 to Army Regulation (AR) 27-10, The authority to dispose of acts of misconduct committed by soldiers in the rank of Sergeant (E-5) and above involving controlled substances is limited to commanders who are Special Courts Martial Convening Authorities (SCMCAs) and are in the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and above. Lieutenant Colonels command battalions, while Colonels command brigades and regiments. At this and most Army installations, SCMCA is held at brigade or regiment level. By default, this regulation, which went into effect on 10

commander is signing soldier leave forms, normally a company-level function.²⁶

In an effort to stem the extremely high attrition rates for first-term enlistees,²⁷ General Reimer, Army Chief of Staff, drafted a memorandum to the Army Chain of Command stating that "almost every soldier we enlist has the moral, physical and mental prerequisites for service. Our challenge is to motivate, train, and lead them -to turn them into soldiers." He asked "all leaders [to] reexamine your procedures to ensure we are doing everything possible to help conserve our most precious resource -our quality soldiers."²⁸ The Chiefs concern was addressed six days later in an all Army message (ALARACT) withdrawing separation authority from battalion commanders (lieutenant colonel level) and elevating it to Special Courts Martial Convening Authority (colonel level).²⁹ Although separation authority was later restored to the lieutenant colonel level, what is at issue is the thought process at the senior leadership level that simply elevating the decision was the solution.³⁰ Rather than "fix" the problem, the unintended consequence of this change in policy was, first, the brigade commander was now required to review over 8000 discharge packets annually, essentially doing the work of six subordinate commanders and taking time away from his other responsibilities -training, mentoring, and

March 1997, took UCMJ authority from no less than 14 battalion commanders (lieutenant colonels) and elevated it to regimental levels (colonel).

²⁶ LTC D.T. Eccles, Royal Tank Regiment, "Risk Aversion and the Zero Defect Culture," *The British Army Review* #114

²⁷ All the Services are experiencing extremely high attrition rates for initial entry personnel, ranging from 33 percent to 37 percent, before completion of their first term enlistment.

²⁸ General Dennis Reimer, CSA, memorandum (no subject given) to the Chain of Command, dated 6 December 1996

²⁹ Enlisted Military Personnel Division, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Army wide message, subject: "Attrition of First-Term Enlisted Solders," 121 752Z December 96. See also Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Army, Memorandum for All MACOM DCSPERS, Subject: "First Term Attrition Reduction Goals." 12 December 1997

³⁰ In January 1997, General Reimer visited Fort Benning, GA and spoke directly to the leadership of the Infantry Training Brigade (The unit responsible for conducting all Infantry One Station Unit Training (OSUT)) throughout the Army. When asked by one of the battalion commanders about the policy, General Reimer stated he was not aware of the personnel policy but would "look into it." Separation authority was restored to the lieutenant colonel level on 15 January 1997. See Enlisted Military Personnel Division, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for

guiding. Second, battalion commanders saw the policy, not as a better way to reduce attrition, but rather as a lack of confidence by their senior leadership in their ability to command.

In a similar trend, the Secretary of Defense in July 1997, withdrew authority from the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff to authorize counter drug ground reconnaissance and ground-based detection, monitoring and communications missions by the U.S. armed forces along the U.S. southwest border.³¹ This was in response to the fatal shooting death of Esequiel Hernandez, a young goat herder, near the town of Redford, TX in May, 1997.³²

I do not presume to imply that the elevating of discharge authority, disciplinary authority, or withdrawing counter drug reconnaissance was either the right or the wrong decision; nor do I presume to argue there is not sometimes a need to centralize decisions or withhold certain authorities from subordinate leaders. However, when it is done, leaders need to fully understand the implications and consequences of their actions.

In instances such as the preceding case of non-judicial punishment, there is no question that a brigade commander or ship's captain has the experience and wisdom to adjudicate; the question one should ask is: Where did he get that experience and wisdom? The answer would most likely be the sum total of his military experiences, especially as a battalion commander, where he had the opportunity to exercise command authority and receive, if necessary, the mentoring of a senior officer. Using the same example, but now looking three or four years into the future, the battalion commander is now a brigade commander responsible for making

Personnel, Army wide message ALARACT, subject: "Attrition of First-Term Enlisted Soldiers -Supplemental Guidance," 151717Z January 97

³¹ Secretary of Defense, Memorandum for Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff and Under Secretary of Defense (Policy), SUBJECT: JTF-6 Southwest Border Incident, dated 24 July 1997 and Memorandum for Secretaries of the Military Departments, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, SUBJECT: Military Support to Counternarcotics Activities, 6 October 1997,2

³² Richard J. Newman, "A Timeout in the Military's War on Drugs, At issue: Should troops hunt smugglers?" *U.S. News and World Report*, 4 August 1997, www.usnews.com/usnews/issue/970804/4bord.htm

decisions, as well as training and mentoring subordinates. In this scenario, the brigade commander lacks the practical experience and confidence he might otherwise have received at the subordinate command level given a different command climate and the absence of a mistake free environment.

When authority is removed, so are opportunity, experience, initiative, and innovation. The short-term gains - "no mistakes on my watch" - achieved by elevating decision-making or giving "how to" orders come at a long-term price. Subordinate leaders denied decision-making authority or inhibited in "what" they can do or "how" they can do it early in their careers will, in all probability, continue those practices when they achieve senior ranks. This escalating spiral works very well in the short term, but contains the seeds of disaster. First, subordinate leaders lose the opportunity to lead and to learn. Far more important, initiative and innovation are lost in the process. RAND documented this malady in a 1997 study comparing centralized and decentralized organizations. RAND found that "highly centralized, regulated systems can be fine tuned for efficiency in the short run, but when conditions change, the entire structure runs a greater risk of breaking. Centralized controls put a floor under behavior and constitute some guarantee that short-term mistakes can be kept under control. On the other hand, the rule-bound nature of centralized control also tends to put a ceiling on performance, failing to permit members of the organization to take risks and to make the kind of mistakes that result in learning."³³ Practical value comes with applied experience. You can learn only so much of the profession of arms from books and in the classroom; true leadership is only learned by doing.

Second, senior leaders, by elevating, decision making authority, abdicate their responsibility to mentor, coach, or otherwise teach those they are charged to lead. While it is

³³ Francis Fukuyama and Abram N. Shulsky, *The "Virtual Corporation" and Army Organization*. RAND, No. ADA329316 (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 1997), 20

sometimes "easier to do it yourself," this is a lose-lose situation. Senior leaders take on more and more work or assign it to "proven" subordinates, while other subordinates are made to feel their ideas are not wanted or that they are not allowed to make a contribution. As this process develops, some people, not seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, are going to leave. Others will weather the storm, do the best they can and eventually replace their leaders. How prepared, how confident will they be to lead given their lack of practical experience? Are they going to allow subordinates to make those decisions they were not allowed to make? If so, how prepared are they to mentor, guide and teach their subordinates? Finally if they are unsure, are they going to seek guidance from their superiors?

"Good leaders," according to General Krulak, "create an environment where subordinates are allowed to make mistakes, yet are not put in situations for which they are unprepared or in which the mistake could be dangerous."³⁴ We are so busy ensuring our organizations are mistake free and our subordinates do the "right thing," that, in many cases, we fail to train our younger leaders in decision-making techniques, fail to allow them the experiences they need to grow and mature, and fail to motivate and challenge them. We have down-sized the Services in the expectation that new technologies, more modern equipment, and full spectrum dominance will guarantee our success. In short, we have invested extraordinary effort developing and integrating technology and new equipment, while failing to maintain the cultural values and mores necessary to insure their optimum success.³⁵ But the US Army Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet 525-5, *Force XXI Operations*, reminds us that "success on past battlefields has resulted not so much from technological advances but from

³⁴ Krulak, 19

³⁵ A separate but related issue is the absence of a new or different organizational structure that can best make use of these technologies. Successful implementation of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) requires the successful integration of three factors: Technological change, organizational change, and doctrinal change. Blaker, 23

innovative ways of considering and combining available and sometimes new technologies as they apply to warfighting."³⁶ As the Services move into the 21st century, we will see greater efforts to harness technological innovations and digital application to achieve information dominance, greater situational awareness, and a common operating picture of the battlefield. These new systems will have the ability to make every, soldier, sailor, airman, and marine an intelligence sensor, feeding information to a centralized decision-maker, or they have the potential to allow the distribution of key friendly and enemy information forward and laterally to the key leaders on the ground.³⁷ How we route this information and build the decision-making structure to process it is still being developed, but the centralized planning foundation we are currently pouring for our young leaders is not reflective of the architectural plan we have written in our manuals and doctrine. While no guarantee exists that the plans, as written, will fully capture the vast potential of the new technologies and modern equipment; is it not more likely to be successful if we harness the power, initiative, and full engagement of all our leaders, not just those senior enough to direct *their* solutions to future challenges? As Joint Pub I advises, we must strike a careful balance among technology, tradition and the essential role of people.³⁸ Or as Major Jack Kammerer cautions, "The immense potential of new digital technologies is tarnished by the underlying fear that they may tip this careful balance in favor of more centralized command and control (C2) on the future battlefield."³⁹

³⁶ US. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-5, *Force XXI Operations*, (Fort Monroe, VA: U.S. Army TRADOC, 1 August 1994), 1-5

³⁷ While management literature of the past 15 years has had a number of concepts, including downsizing, total quality control, and outsourcing, one broad common theme running through much of it is information and how it flows through organizations. What many have come to understand is that information, even within the organization, is not free, and that explicit attention must be paid to facilitating its flow. Information is costly to acquire and transmit, the process takes time and effort, and it is not free from error and distortion. Fukuyama and Shulsky, 5- 9

³⁸ Department of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Pub 1*, Washington, D.C., 10 January 1995, 1-2

³⁹ Major Jack Kammerer, USA, "Preserving Mission-Focused Command and Control," *Military Review*, Sep-Oct 1997, 65

Chapter 3 Risk Avoidance

It is always a bad sign in any army when scapegoats are habitually sought out and brought to sacrifice for every conceivable mistake. It usually shows something wrong in the very highest command. It completely inhibits the willingness of the junior commanders to make decisions, for they will always try to get chapter and verse for every thing they do, finishing up more often than not with a miserable piece of casuistry instead of the decisions which would spell release.

*Erwin Rommel*⁴⁰

We can recruit intelligent, dedicated men and women into our Armed Forces; we can arm those forces with the most lethal, sophisticated, and costly weapon systems available; and we can write doctrine for the effective employment of both men and machines; but if we can not harness our soldiers' intellect and foster their initiative, prudent risk taking, teamwork, and innate decision making abilities, we will continue to lose the very soldiers we wish to retain and never realize our, or their, full potential. The U.S. military has always prided itself on, and developed its tactical doctrine⁴¹ around, the concept of individual initiative. Unfortunately, in some instances, efforts to achieve perfection are, in fact, weakening the very characteristics and culture we want to develop and will need to successfully bring the military into the 21st Century.

Initiative and risk taking

Our doctrine is designed to give leaders "what to do" options, not lock step, "how to do" it directives. Service manuals, especially those concerned with leadership issues, highlight initiative, self-reliance, teamwork, and innovative thinking. Let us look at the following examples:

⁴⁰ Erwin Rommel: *The Rommel Papers*, xviii, 1953

⁴¹ Doctrine must be definitive enough to guide specific operations, yet remain adaptable enough to address diverse and varied situations worldwide. *Field Manual (FM) 100-5 Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army) June 1993, 1-1

Successful accomplishment of specified and implied missions results from subordinate leaders at all echelons exercising disciplined initiative within the commander's intent. Effective leaders strive to create an environment of trust and understanding that encourages their subordinates to seize the initiative and act.⁴² Army Field Manual (FM) 22-100 *Army Leadership*

By, 2010 we should be able to enhance the capabilities of our forces through technology. This will, in turn, expand our greatest advantage: the adaptability, initiative, teamwork, and commitment of our people at every level.⁴³ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Joint Vision 2010*

Applied to individual soldiers and leaders, initiative requires a willingness and ability to act independently within the framework of the higher commander's intent.⁴⁴ Field Manual (FM) 100-5 *Operations*

Despite doctrinal imperatives and historical examples pointing toward the need to exercise initiative and prudent risk taking, many leaders continue to stifle these characteristics through micro-management, over centralization, and an insistence on zero defects within their organizations. Anyone who has been in the military for any period of time has come across the leader who insists that the mission has to be done "his" way. For example the battalion commander who skips the chain of command and gives orders directly to the platoon and squad sergeants; the Brigade commander who belittles a subordinate in public because the subordinate deviated from the "plan;" or the Division commander who is so centralized he insists that every decision be made at his level.

These leaders, although accomplishing the immediate mission, are achieving short-term goals at the expense of long term value to the service and the nation. Furthermore, they are rewarded for doing so. Our entire system is programmed to reward flawless execution, however achieved, versus development of systemic programs or long-term objectives, when achieved through methods involving risk or mistakes. Leaders who achieve immediate success, regardless

⁴² Field Manual (FM) 22-100, *Army Leadership* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army) October 1998, 1-10

⁴³ Department of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Joint Vision 2010*. Washington, D.C., July 1996, 18

⁴⁴ Field Manual (FM) 100-5 *Operations*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army) June 1993, 2-6

of methodology, are quickly recognized, but the leader who empowers his subordinates fosters an environment where junior leaders can learn, albeit sometimes at the expense of a few mistakes, in order to create lasting programs or systems is overlooked. Rapid turnover of both leaders and subordinates does not facilitate recognition of long term, lasting programs. Many times, the true value of the subordinate is not realized until well after he leaves the organization; far too late to recognize him or the success of his achievements. The message conveyed and received by peers and contemporaries is clear; immediate results get rewarded with good reports, good assignments, and promotions. As a result, we are developing an institution of leaders focused on short-term results, leaders reluctant to share good ideas, and leaders who are averse to taking risks. In the words of one officer, "Everyone seems afraid to take the slightest chance at making a mistake."⁴⁵

Risk aversion and zero defects are not opposites, but rather two sides of the same coin. One supports the other. While senior leaders stifle initiative by centralizing decisions, dictating specifics and generally insuring a mistake free environment, subordinate leaders quickly recognize the penalties for "thinking outside the box." VADM Henry Griffin III, Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet recognizing the same problem, characterizes it this way; "To succeed, we must change the way we look at risk taking. Institutionally, we've become risk averse. Most of us know why. We are not generally rewarded for taking risks. Often the opposite is true. We are rewarded for flawless execution rather than pushing an innovative idea that may be flawed, though safe, when tried. That way of thinking is a disincentive to innovation. It could conceivably threaten our future combat readiness and our ability to field and operate the next generation of weapon systems. Prudent risk takers and innovators must be

⁴⁵ Lucian K. Truscott, 4th, "A Military Problem Money Can't Solve," *New York Times*, March 2, 1999

rewarded."⁴⁶ Similarly, General Krulak also acknowledged the problem and linked zero defects and risk avoidance this way:

Frequently those who cannot tolerate mistakes are guilty of irresponsible behavior themselves. They have been given responsibility for the training and leadership development of their subordinates. Marines. But how can they encourage imaginative training or promote safe risk taking, if their junior leaders retreat from new ideas for fear of making a mistake? If it is safer to repeat a proven course of action or do nothing, why try something new? How do you develop a leader, a decision-maker, if you never let them make decisions? These are the dilemmas to which a zero-defects mentality leads.⁴⁷

Risk avoidance, like zero defects, is replete with antidotal evidence. Previously cited examples permeate chapter two: leaders who are reluctant to make a decision for fear they will be wrong and leaders doing the easier wrong, rather than the harder right. However, identifying non-actions – failure to make decisions, following the last directive versus reacting to a changing situation, or taking action beyond that that was specifically directed - is more difficult. Yet a closer look, over time, at the same military publications previously cited for initiative and vision reveal a trend, although slight, not toward innovation but toward following orders. For example, when you compare the 1986 and 1993 versions of FM 100-5 *Army Operations*, the earlier version focuses on promoting subordinate leaders' flexibility and freedom of operation. Some of the main themes are:

- The initial plan "will establish commander's intent and concept of operations and the responsibilities of subordinate units. It will however, leave the greatest possible operational and tactical freedom to subordinate leaders."
- "Mission orders that specify *what* must be done without prescribing *how* it must be done should be used in most cases."

⁴⁶ Quote was part of an interview by VADM Henry C. Giffin III, USN, Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet in *Surface SITREP*, entitled "Our Deployed Forces' Readiness Continues to be Outstanding," Volume XIV, No. 6, Dec 98/Jan 99, pg. 5-6

⁴⁷ Gen. Charles C. Krulak, USMC, "Responsibility, Accountability, and the Zero-Defects Mentality." *Marine Corps Gazette*, May 1997, 19

- "Control measures should secure cooperation between forces without imposing unnecessary restrictions on the freedom of junior leaders."⁴⁸

"By contrast, the 1993 version places more emphasis on commander's role: 'To command is to direct. Command at all levels is the art of motivating and directing soldiers and their leaders into action to accomplish missions.' The 1993 version does, however, contain a major statement concerning the importance of flexibility for subordinate leaders as follows:

The need for flexibility in command is greatest for the committed maneuver unit commander. He can neither cope with constant direction from above nor can he constantly provide detailed direction to his staff and subordinate commanders. He and his organization must know the intent of the commander two levels above, understand the concept of operation and intent of the immediate commander, and know the responsibilities of flanking and supporting units. Then, the unit commander can fight his unit confidently. He can anticipate events and act freely and boldly to accomplish his mission with minimal guidance, *particularly when he cannot communicate with his commander.* (Emphasis added)

It is of interest that the phrase "particularly when he cannot communicate with his commander" is absent from the 1986 version; the 1986 version therefore, tends to be somewhat more forceful in presenting this flexibility as a virtue in itself.⁴⁹ This same concept is captured and magnified in a recent Joint publication, *Concept for Future Joint Operation*. Under the title of Innovative Leadership, specifically referring to technological advances in information superiority, is the following construct: "Leader development may be enhanced using the timely common picture of the battlespace provided by information superiority. Commanders' ability to 'see' events will allow them to delegate more to subordinate commanders, *confident that errors can be seen and quickly corrected*"⁵⁰ (*Italics added*) The message transmitted is innovation and freedom of action, but only under limited control.

⁴⁸ Field Manual (FM) 100-5 *Operations*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army) May 1986, 21

⁴⁹Fukuyama, 42-43

⁵⁰ Department of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Concept for Future Joint Operations -Expanding Joint Vision 2010*, Washington, D.C., May 1997, 74

Another interesting dimension of both the 1983 and 1999 versions of *Leadership* is the somewhat consistent use of an illustrative historical vignette involving Colonel Joshua Chamberlain's defense of Little Round Top at the Battle of Gettysburg. The prelude to the 1983 version asked the reader to focus on the following question: "What leadership actions caused success?"⁵¹ Similarly, the 1999 version focuses on leader actions in combat - periods of stress, exhaustion, and disorientation. What both examples strive to illustrate is Chamberlain's innovative tactics and best utilization of his forces in the face of what appeared to be a hopeless situation. What is lost in the discussion is, although Chamberlain's actions were both daring and unusual, all his actions were performed within the context of his orders - defending a fixed position. Both vignettes give one line to an unnamed staff officer who went to Colonel Vincent, Chamberlain's commander, and explained the need to place troops on Little Round Top. This unnamed staff officer was Colonel Patty O'Rourke.⁵² O'Rourke, without authority and contrary to previous written orders, risked his career and gave Colonel Vincent orders to defend the Union's left flank. How much more illustrative it would have been to use Colonel O'Rourke's actions to exemplify innovation, flexibility and morale courage.

Lacking specific incidences of risk avoidance, a third method of detecting its existence is to examine what others think of us. The following essay was written by a British Army officer serving in Sarajevo with Headquarters Implementation Force (IFOR) where he had the opportunity to study the military culture of 34 different national military forces. His intent was to sound a warning in respect to his own military, but the insight is particularly direct and serves as an independent reiteration of what I believe to be a growing problem in our Armed Forces.

The final strand is the reluctance that some officers display to disagree with their superiors, even way in advance of the point of decision. Anecdotal

⁵¹ FM 22-100 (1983), 3

⁵² For a more complete discussion of Colonel O'Rourke's actions that day, see Harry J Maihafer's *Brave Decisions*.

examples of the effective termination of careers for displays of dissent from the opinion of senior officers present are legion. Consequently independent thought and formal debate is the exception rather than the rule and, in public, a bland and rather unhealthy consensus prevails. These four trends have combined to produce an intolerance for mistakes or what is known as a "zero defect culture" within the American military. Consequently, many decisions must now be referred to higher authority. For example, nowadays it is quite common for every soldier's leave pass to be approved personally by the Battalion Commander. A more serious consequence perhaps than the inefficiency that this imposes on the system is the creation of a culture of risk aversion. Generations of US Officers are growing up without being encouraged to exercise any autonomous authority and with little instruction in how to assess and then be prepared to take risks in pursuance of a military objective. Thus there is erosion of the key virtue that underpins every military organization: the moral courage to take risks.⁵³

Such acts of omission are rarely categorized as mistakes. To some more progressive leaders, this might be seen as a lack of initiative or inexperience on the subordinate's part. But to the centralized leader, this, in his mind, is justification, if he thought he needed it, to take on more decision-making responsibilities. To ensure fewer and fewer mistakes, the micro-manager makes more and more decisions. Perhaps he justifies his actions by believing he is protecting his subordinates from their own mistakes, but more likely he makes the decisions to ensure things are done his way. Subordinates know what needs to be done, but either choose to do nothing or let others make the decision and take the risk. Again, General Krulak warns us of the dangers. "The leader with a zero defect mentality often breeds this kind of irresponsible behavior. If mistakes are simply not tolerated, then subordinates tend to become persons of omission. They do nothing because omission is perceived as less risky than doing something -something which may entail failure."⁵⁴

⁵³ D. T. Eccles, LTC Royal Tank Regiment, "Risk Aversion and the Zero Defect Culture," *The British Army Review* #114

⁵⁴Krulak, 19

Chapter 4 Implications for the Services

When I became Chief of Staff I set two personal goals for myself. The first was to ensure that the Army was continually prepared to go to war, and the second was to create a climate in which each member could find personal meaning and fulfillment. It is my belief that only by attainment of the second goal will we ensure the first.

*GEN Edward C. Meyer
Former Army Chief of Staff⁵⁵*

Future warfighting doctrine stresses current and proposed improvements in information and systems integration technologies, development of long-range precision capabilities, and advances in low observable technologies. This "system of systems" will enable US forces to gain:

Dominant battlespace awareness, an interactive "picture" which will yield much more accurate assessments of friendly and enemy operations within the area of interest. Although this will not eliminate the fog of war, dominant battlespace awareness will improve situational awareness, decrease response time, and make the battlespace considerably more transparent to those who achieve it.⁵⁶

More importantly, the combination of these technologies will enable commanders "to attack targets successfully with fewer platforms and less ordinance while achieving objectives more rapidly and with reduced risk. Individual warfighters will be empowered as never before, with an array of detection, targeting, and communications equipment that will greatly magnify the power of small units."⁵⁷ These technologies will allow, while reduced force structure (draw-down) will require:

⁵⁵ Field Manual (FM) 22-100, *Army Leadership*, 1-13

⁵⁶ DoD, *Joint Vision 2010*, 13

⁵⁷ DoD, *Joint Vision 2010*, 13

Increased capability at lower echelons to control more lethal forces over larger areas, thus leveraging the skills and initiatives of individuals and small units. These capabilities could empower a degree of independent maneuver, planning, and coordination at lower echelons, which were normally exercised by more senior commanders in the past. Concurrently, commanders at higher echelons will use these technologies to reduce the friction of war and apply precise centralized control when and where appropriate.⁵⁸

And therein lies the conundrum. How do we train our leaders and their subordinates to utilize the advanced technology, evaluate the situation, manage the risk, and make the "right" decision while taking care of their people and accomplishing the mission?⁵⁹ How do we train leaders to empower their subordinates and allow them to make the decisions they have been trained to make? And finally, how do we train leaders to differentiate between too little guidance and micro-management? As Joint Vision 2010 counsels, we must find the "optimal balance between centralized and decentralized command and control."⁶⁰ That challenge is not a doctrinal concern but a leadership challenge.

Leadership Responsibilities

Leadership, as defined in *Army Leadership*, is **influencing**⁶¹ people -by providing purpose, direction, and motivation -while **operating** to accomplish the mission and **improving** the organization.⁶² U.S. military doctrine, commander's intent, mission oriented orders, and our Services' leadership manuals all stress a reliance on initiative and the criticality of decision-

⁵⁸ DoD, *Joint Vision 2010*, 15

⁵⁹ A problem is an existing condition or situation in which what you want to happen is different from what is happening. Decision making is the process that begins to change that situation. Thus, decision making is knowing *whether* to decide, then *when* and *what* to decide. It also includes an **understanding** of the **consequences** of your **decisions**. (Bold added) Field Manual (FM) 22-100, 5-3

⁶⁰ DoD, *Joint Vision 2010*, 15; "A highly centralized, regulated system can be fine tuned for efficiency in the short run, but when conditions change, the entire structure runs a greater risk of breaking. Centralized controls put a floor under behavior and constitute some guarantee that short-run mistakes can be kept under control. On the other hand, the rule-bound nature of centralized control also tends to put a ceiling on performance, failing to permit members of the organization to take risks and to make the kinds of mistakes that result in learning." Fukuyama, 20

⁶¹ Leader actions that demonstrate influencing include - communicating: Displaying good oral, written, and listening skills; decision-making: Using sound judgement, logical reasoning, and using resources wisely (including people); and motivating: Inspiring and guiding others toward mission accomplishment. Field Manual (FM) 22-100, 2-24

making abilities. History is replete with examples of individual initiative making the difference between victory and defeat on the battlefield. However, if senior leaders fail to give their subordinates the opportunity to exercise initiative or fail to allow them to learn from their mistakes, or if junior leaders fail to accept the responsibilities of leadership, then experience, and the knowledge that comes with experience, will be lacking when needed. We can equip the unit with the most modern weapon systems; we can endeavor to dominate the battlefield and maintain total situational awareness; but "regardless of how sophisticated technology becomes, the warfighter's judgement, creativity, and' adaptability in the face of highly dynamic situations will be essential to the success of future joint operations. The human element is especially important in situations where we cannot bring technological capabilities fully to bear against opponents who seek to nullify our technological superiority by various means. In these cases, success will depend, as it has historically, on the physical, intellectual and moral strength of the individual soldier, sailor, airman, and marine -especially their adaptability in the face of the unexpected."⁶³

In General Shelton's words, "People are more important than hardware, we can not allow the quality of the force to suffer."⁶⁴

Information Flow

Essential to all organizations is information flow –how information is processed, distributed, who makes decisions on its content and who acts on it and how it is acted upon.

Information

enters an organization at all points, but a great deal of it comes in at the bottom. The more hierarchical the organization, the more it requires information entering at the bottom to be passed up a multi-layer hierarchy for decision and then back down again for action. The movement of

⁶² Field Manual (FM) 22-100, 1-2

⁶³ "Joint Vision 2010, American Military – Preparing for Tomorrow," Joint Forces Quarterly, Summary 1996, 47

information through a hierarchy not only slows down the process but substantially increases the risk that it will be distorted as it is handed from one level to another. Given certain conditions, such as time constraints and increased demands from higher headquarters, it is common for each echelon to pass along only that information it thinks the next echelon, above and below it, needs or wants to hear.⁶⁵ What will be critical as we move into the 21st century and become more dependent on information is for leaders to understand what should and should not be centralized in this process.

In that context, we have become gatekeepers of information and, to a limited extent, the process of change itself. Our culture has bred a leadership mentality that abhors ambiguity. As such, we have raised the practice of "no surprises" to a fine art. Any lack of clarity or fluctuation from the expected creates in us a discomfort that we, not only can not tolerate, but in fact, attempt to protect ourselves from. The solution, according to Wheatley, is to "quickly find our way out of this discomfort by focusing on one element, coming up with a solution, and pretending not to notice the questions we've left hanging."⁶⁶ Senior leaders contribute to the problem by minimizing or ignoring subordinate input, further adding to a perception of micro-management and stifling subordinate initiative. Technology offers the military the opportunity to decrease information-processing time while, at the same time, increase the information's lateral transmission. However, no level of technology will offset the challenges to any system that relies on a sole decision-maker.⁶⁷ Senior leaders must have the courage to abandon this

⁶⁴ Taken from the text of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Shelton's confirmation hearing.

⁶⁵ Fukuyama, 9-10

⁶⁶ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science - Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe*, (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers), 109

⁶⁷ "There is, of course, nothing new in the role that technology will play in terms of communications up and down the compressed continuum of war. 'From Plato to NATO,' Martin van Creveld has pointed out in this regard, 'the history of command in war consists essentially of an endless quest for certainty.' But that certainty is not necessarily enhanced by the quantum leap in technology which may now inflict Clausewitz's 'fog of war' on the compressed continuum. Shorter decision times occasioned by that compression and electronically gathered information mean

myopic "attention to detail" passion and step far enough back to observe movements and patterns with in the total system. It is this "gatekeeper" process that needs revision.

Doctrine

Excluding the occasional periodic articles by the Service Chiefs,⁶⁸ very few military publications address the problems of zero defects and risk avoidance. The majority of military publications, both service and joint, deal in the operational and strategic employment of systems to achieve Full Spectrum Dominance -technologically superior equipment, precision strikes, and improvements in information and systems integration technologies. Although most contain vague references to the importance of people -achieving a balance between centralized and decentralized control, empowering subordinates, and increased capability at lower echelons to control more lethal forces over larger areas -very little is written on how this will be accomplished. LTG Walter Ulmer framed it this way, "There presently are no highly visible, heavily resourced efforts to define, inculcate, and monitor the creation and sustainment of organizational climates that challenge, inspire, and motivate all ranks." This is particularly distressing given the recent visibility of cases of abuses of power, the plethora in survey data indicating instances of careerism and over-centralization, and finally, the problems all Services are having recruiting and retaining quality personnel.

less time to discover ambiguities or to analyze those ambiguities that are already apparent." David Jablonsky, "US Military Doctrine and the Revolution in Military Affairs," *Parameters*, Autumn 1994, 26

⁶⁸ See General Dennis J. Reimer, USA, "Leadership for the 21st Century: Empowerment, Environment and the Golden Rule," *Military Review*, January-February 1996, 5-9; General Charles C. Krulak, USMC, "Responsibility, Accountability, and the Zero-Defects Mentality," *Marine Corps Gazette*, May 1997 18-19; General Ronald R. Fogleman, USAF, "Not a One Mistake Air Force," Downloaded from Air Force Homepage: www.af.rmil/cgi-bin/multigate, 15 April 1999, 1-3; Richard Danzig, Secretary of the Navy, "Letter," *Quantico Sentry*, 12 March 1999, A1

Chapter 5 Conclusions

To inquire Wand when we make mistakes is not to apologize. War is replete with mistakes because it is full of improvisations. In war we are always doing something for the first time. It would be a miracle if what we improvised under the stress of war should be perfect.

*Vice Admiral H G. Rickover, USN
Testimony before House Military
Appropriations Subcommittee,
April 1964⁶⁹*

The value of learning from one's mistakes cannot be bought or learned from books (although reading biographies of great leaders helps the learning process). It is a mental and emotional process that must be nurtured, developed, and, most of all, exercised. It can be one of the least complicated and simplest of joys if it is allowed to occur in an atmosphere of understanding (I've been there) and mentoring (how can we learn from this?) leadership. Otherwise initiative, risk taking, and experimenting stops, and is quickly replaced by a "follow the book" or "it's always been done that way" mentality. Lieutenant Butler, in an article in *Proceedings*, expressed this sentiment when she wrote of her first commander, "He taught me how to think differently: looking for surfaces and gaps; focusing on the critical vulnerability in a situation; and thinking two levels up to make the boss's job easier. He trusted my instincts when I served as Officer of the Deck. He asked for input on things -from policies for the ship to grammar recommendations on drafts of articles he was writing... but I found out very quickly just how much in the minority he is."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Heintz, 194

⁷⁰ Butler, 2

Lieutenant Butler's comment actually focuses us on two valuable constructs that instances of zero defects and micro-management have seriously undermined. The first is experience; the second is meaning. Once physical needs are met, people need meaning in their lives and meaning in their work. In times of change or uncertainty, people are able to adapt, make sacrifices, and make sense out of non-sense if they are able to create meaning in their work.⁷¹ All of us need to know "why." (How often have you asked yourself, or heard others say, "I wish I knew why we are doing this?") Micro-managers not only over-direct, but see little or no reason to explain their decisions. Further more, by assuming the decision-making processes of their subordinates, they magnify the problem. If decisions are not explained to subordinate leaders, those same junior leaders will have little ability to explain those decisions to their subordinates.

The desire for meaning can only be facilitated by leaders who make the effort to explain the changes the Services are now undertaking, the reasons for their sacrifice, and the leader and the Service's vision for the future. The alternative is to continue down the current path and hope technology will overcome leadership flaws, recruiting shortfalls and readiness problems.

Social Influences

Although service members' concerns with micro-management, zero defects, and over supervision have periodically surfaced before, it has been magnified now by an unprecedented down-sizing that happened to occur at the same time that the services and the nation's ethical, operational and social standards were being exposed, and to some extent questioned. Tailhook and Aberdeen Proving Grounds; Kobar Towers and the Kenyan Embassy bombings; Sergeant Major McKinney and General Hale; all received national attention. For the Services' part, extraordinary measures were, and continue to be, taken to correct these social problems. But

⁷¹ Wheatley, 134

again, many of these measures result in policy statements and regulations, all of which require detailed reporting requirements. The unintended result is not only more work with less people and less resources, but also a not so subtle message to the senior leader of the organization that "he" is being evaluated and measured, to some extent, by the personal behavior of unit personnel. As a result, he gives his unit a little more direction vice intent, more specifics vice general guidance. General Ulmer put it this way:

The confluence of organizational and environmental pressures at the moment presents institutional response challenges of a different order of magnitude. A healthy job market for officers who leave the service, the lack of a clear military threat to the United States, the higher expectations for a "decent family life," and less tolerance among capable young people for poor leadership climates create a potent mixture. It is a tale of dedication and commitment that has produced local miracles while in effect neglecting and hazarding the future of the institution. The Army's (read service) culture promotes vigorous response to policy initiatives without regard for the collective long-term consequences of such response. Inordinate focus on the immediate (non-tactical) mission along with institutional systems that cater to conspicuous short-term results represent major challenges to both the current and future leadership.⁷²

Lieutenant Butler's comment is shorter, but the same message, "The Navy is not about going to sea or being a warrior anymore. It is about day-to-day administrative drudgery; it is about micromanaging your sailors' personal and professional lives; it is about having your hands tied when all you want is what is best for your sailors. We focus on the inane administrative minutia; as a result, the warfighting skills we are supposed to refine for our nation are eroding"⁷³

⁷² General Walter F. Ulmer, Jr. "Military Leadership into the 21st Century: Another 'Bridge Too Far?'" *Parameters*, Spring 1998, 6

⁷³ Butler, 2

Chapter 6 Recommendations

Far better it is to dare mighty things to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.

*Theodore Roosevelt
26th U.S. President*

What the Services have done over the past ten years in terms of managing the draw-down, modernization efforts and operational tempo have been, in the words of Army Chief of Staff, General Dennis Reimer, an "unprecedented accomplishment."⁷⁴ But we have clearly reached a point where we can no longer "do more, with less." The draw-down offered the Services a managed means of reducing the force, thereby enabling them to program monies for modernization and technological advances and, to an extent, allowed the Services the opportunity to modify doctrine. But true change takes time, and revolutionary change requires, not only time, but as in all previous instances of change, more than one process to occur before the change is complete.⁷⁵ The simple fact of the matter is, that in light of the unprecedented OPTEMPO/PERTEMPO, modernization has failed to offset the reductions in personnel. Force structure was reduced (too quickly) before the technological changes the doctrine required were developed and in place. No one disagrees that our leaders are busier than they have ever been before. In fact, General Reimer has stated that, "we are burning them out and we're losing too

⁷⁴ General Dennis Reimer, USA, "Random Thoughts while Running." GSA 98-17. General Reimer periodically puts out a document to senior Army leaders called "Random Thoughts while Running." Source for this document was the Internet; consequently there were no page numbers.

⁷⁵ Blaker, 24; O'Hanlon, 81

many good ones. Statistically, I can't prove that we are losing the best and the brightest, but my sense is that we are losing some very good ones. We need to work our way through this and that's the task of strategic leadership. One of the things we must do is to carve out the time to focus downward....I am totally convinced that we must focus on our soldiers and do a lot of mentoring during the next few years."⁷⁶

Leadership

Leadership, an amorphous phenomenon that has been studied and intrigued the military profession since formal study began, is being studied now for its relational aspects focusing on followership, empowerment, and leader accessibility. In motivation theory, attention is shifting from the enticement of external rewards (military can read as increased pay; medical, educational, and retirement benefits) to the intrinsic motivators that spring from the work itself (military read as values, empowerment, and self-worth).⁷⁷

If we are to continue to be successful into the 21st Century, and if we believe that the doctrinal leadership concepts of initiative, decentralized execution, and adaptability embodied in Joint Vision 2010 and the Services' future warfighting doctrine are required to fully exploit new technology and modernized equipment, then leaders need to divorce themselves from a mechanical model (cog in the wheel) mentality and explore changes to our personnel system, our leadership training, and our mentoring and evaluation methods.

Mentoring

General Reimer is right on target. We as leaders must mentor our subordinates for today's challenges and prepare them for the future. But, our counsel needs to focus on more than

⁷⁶ Reimer, "Random Thoughts while Running." CSA 98-17 For a more in depth discussion on strategic leadership, read General Reimer's article; "Leadership for the 21st Century: Empowerment, Environment, and the Golden Rule," *Military Review*, January-February 1996, 5-9

⁷⁷ Wheatley, 12

just those immediate things the subordinate is doing right or wrong. Our senior leaders need to publicly and privately recognize that readiness, retention, and morale issues will not disappear with future pay raises or when educational incentives and increased retirement benefits are enacted. The Services must not only believe in mentoring, they must teach it as part of their core curriculum at every level of professional military education. Leaders should fully realize the major contributions mentoring can make to operational readiness by fostering open discussion, trust, and eliminating actual or perceived instances of zero defects. Trust and commitment are essential; the mentor must maintain a determined interest in developing the talent, values and character of his charge. "Mentoring should be thought of as a professional kinship which reflects a personal commitment by the mentor."⁷⁸

Core Values

Information on, even understanding of, zero defects, over centralization, and risk avoidance are only a small part of the transformation equation. What also is needed is the willingness to recognize that problems exist and the commitment to engage them. Each Services' core values speak to courage, honor, selfless service, and a commitment to others as well as the nation. Our modernization programs, our revolution in military affairs and our leadership strategies for the twenty-first century must focus inward as well as outward, down to our subordinates as well as our own needs, and ultimately on what is best for our Service and our nation. "We know that to change, intellectual change must precede physical change."⁷⁹

Margaret Wheatley postulated that within organizations there is a positive force, a basin for activity, so attractive that it pulls all behaviors toward it and creates coherence. This force is

⁷⁸ Cecil J. Amparan, Colonel, "Universal Mentoring: Expanding Opportunity Across the Officer Ranks," *Marine Corps Gazette*, January 1996, 38

meaning.⁸⁰ An individual's main concern writes Viktor Frankl "is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in.. life."⁸¹ To quote Wheatley again,

I have seen companies make deliberate use of meaning to move through times of traumatic change. I've seen leaders make great efforts to speak forthrightly and frequently to employees about current struggles, about the tough times that lie ahead, and about what they dream of for the future. These conversations fill a painful period with new purpose, give reason for the current need to sacrifice and hold on. In most cases, given this kind of meaningful information, workers respond with allegiance and energy.

All of us want to know the "why" of what is going on. We instinctively reach out to leaders who work with us on creating meaning. Those who give voice and form to our search for meaning, and who help us make our work purposeful, are leaders we cherish.⁸²

We must recognize individual worth and achievement, foster innovation and experimentation, and encourage new thinking. We need to do more than talk about "expanding the envelop" and thinking "outside the box," we need to allow it to materialize. Only by venturing into the unknown do we enable new ideas to grow and take form. To do this, we need the courage to shed our fear of mistakes, abandon our resistance to change, and reduce our complacency with - "That's the way it's always been done." As Einstein is often quoted as saying: No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it.⁸³ How do we resolve personal needs for freedom and autonomy with organizational needs for prediction and control?

One way to do this is to reemphasize our Service's core values⁸⁴ and recognize the many contributions of our young soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. The true measure of any

⁷⁹ General Dennis Reimer, Chief of Staff, US Army, Speech to Association of the United States Army, Orlando, FL., 15 February 1999; see also Gordon R. Sullivan, Gen. (Ret.) and James M. Dubik, Col., "War in the Information Age, *Military Review*, April 1994, 54

⁸⁰ Wheatley, 133-134

⁸¹ Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 115

⁸² Wheatley, 135

⁸³ Wheatley, 5

⁸⁴ Organizations that have truly internalized values respond to the need for change in ways that remain consistent with itself. "The system is autopoietic, focusing its activities on what is required to maintain its own integrity and

organization's values is not the words in the manuals, but those actions displayed by and values internalized in its people. These are the values that portray consistency, predictability, and a certain quality to each member's behavior. But they are not easily achieved. They require from our leaders the "combination of simply expressed expectations of acceptable behavior and the freedom available to [each] individual to assert themselves in non-deterministic ways."⁸⁵

Communications

This brings us to the need for effective communications. Being able to communicate is one of the most important skills in the military (as well as in life). We spend most of our waking hours communicating. But communications is a two way street; to be effective it has to involve transmission and reception -speaking and listening. We have all spent the majority of our formative and academic years learning how to read and write, but very little time learning to listen. If you truly want to influence someone, you need to understand him. This starts with listening, being receptive to others ideas. Even if the idea is rejected, by demonstrating your willingness to listen, your subordinates will be much more receptive to your decision.

The second key to communications is your personal example. Your actions, not your words, define your character. How you act toward people is far more important to influencing them than what you say. How inspired have you been by the leader who says, "Do as I say, not as I do." Similarly, your private actions need to be consistent with your public conduct. Only then can you gain the trust and confidence of your subordinates.

Finally, use every opportunity to let your subordinates know what is happening and why. Effective leadership demands a clear, guiding vision and strong values. The leader's task is to

self renewal. As it changes, it does so by referring to itself; whatever future form it takes will be consistent with its already established identity. Changes do not occur randomly, in any direction. They always are consistent with what has gone on before, with the history and identity of the system [organization]. Wheatley, 94

⁸⁵Wheatley, 132

communicate them, to keep them at the fore front of whatever mission the unit is conducting, and then to allow individuals and subordinate leaders the freedom and resources to complete the task. There is an old Army saying, "There are four things a soldier don't want to be: cold, wet, hungry, and uninformed! You owe it to your subordinates to keep them informed.

The Army Research Institute has been studying communication and leader to subordinate interaction for some time. They have made the following recommendations:⁸⁶

- Strengthen communication up and down the chain to help soldiers understand the rationale for leader actions and to increase leader awareness of soldier concerns.
- When possible, provide the rationale to soldiers for leaders decisions and actions.
- Both before and during deployment, provide soldiers with the rationale for the level at which decisions are made and address concerns about micro-management.
- Anticipate questions and address them.

Control verses Order

As the Services down-sized, we confused control with order. Lenin once said, "Freedom is good, but control is better." In our efforts to achieve perfection, we have taken the view that if we are to be responsible and accountable then we must exert control by having our hands in everything. We need to re-look our regulations, policy statements, and Service instructions for redundancy and micro-management. Despite our rhetoric on initiative, flexibility and "thinking outside the box," we consistently defend the organizational status quo and inhibit change with bureaucratic regulations, guidelines, policy statements and procedures for ever eventuality.⁸⁷ Our documents should speak to process, not specifics, viable concepts, not permanent structures, and general guidance not step-by-step instructions.

⁸⁶ Steinberg, 23

⁸⁷ During my battalion command tour at Fort Benning I saw one battalion with 56 policy statements and another with 172.

We create order when we encourage conflicts and contradictions to rise to the surface, when we search them out. Because it is these conflicts and ambiguities that challenge us, that force us to constantly exchange ideas and information, that encourage us as individuals and organizations to grow in efficiency and effectiveness.⁸⁸ But this exchange can only occur under a command climate that encourages open exchange, where disagreement is not seen as disloyalty or disrespect, and where vision inspires versus directs. In the final analysis, total control will only stifle the order, efficiency, and increased effectiveness we seek.

Premium on long range improvements

Military culture is one of "Can Do!" We seek mission accomplishment; we "do more with less." We are a culture of action, seeking immediate solutions. But, in the words of Harry Summers, when "carried to its extreme, virtue can become a vice."⁸⁹ As the Services downsized personnel, training and base dollars decreased and mission OPTEMPO/PERTEMPO increased. This "Can Do" attitude clearly contributed to the relative success the military has achieved. But in our zeal to accomplish the mission, we have focused too much on immediate results; a "get it right the first time" attitude. Lack of training time, training dollars, and increased missions all contributed to a need to economize - husband resources and personnel. The system recognized and rewarded efficient, short-term goal oriented leaders, in some cases at the expense of those who sought to emplace long term sustainable systems. I believe a greater focus needed to be placed on personnel skills. Our leaders, our efficiency reports, and to a much greater degree our promotion and command selection boards, need to identify and reward those leaders that were able to train an organization to function, not solely through their "dynamic" leadership, but also in their absence. FM 22-100 *Army Leadership*, the Army's latest leadership

⁸⁸ Wheatley, 115

⁸⁹ Harry Summers, "The 'Can-Do' Curse..." Washington Times, March 18, 1999, 18

manual is just beginning to introduce the concept,⁹⁰ but it is yet to receive much emphasis by senior leaders.

As noted early, all the Services have recently championed revisions to their officer efficiency reporting systems. What effect these changes will have on subordinate leaders' perceptions and/or changes in senior leadership methodologies are still being determined. What is clear is that until perceptions of careerism, micro-management, and lack of purpose are reduced; and feelings of self-worth, trust, and a sense of just plain "fun" are restored to the Services, military readiness, retention and recruitment will suffer. One remedy currently being proposed by LTG Ulmer, and under study by the Army, is to use multiple sources of input as the basis for promotion decisions. That is, in addition to the current system which relies solely on the bosses input, use input from peers and subordinates. LTG Ulmer contend that under the current system, "morale, mission focus, clarity of priorities, effectiveness of communication, trust in leaders, confidence to perform mission-essential tasks, perceived level of discipline, support for initiative and innovation, and fair treatment of all personnel are not systematically recorded."⁹¹ Such systems, used successfully in Army Ranger School and Officer Candidate Schools across the Services and routinely in the military services of other countries have

appear[ed] to remain broadly unacceptable to the US Army general officer corps. It is difficult to dispute the reality that in order to promote individuals who are in fact good leaders we must somehow measure their style of leadership. Only the led know for certain the leader's moral courage, consideration for others, and commitment to unit above self. This is the indisputably crucial element in leader assessment and development systems. If in fact we prize these values and want to ensure that we promote those who have routinely demonstrated them, some form of input from subordinates is required. Again the concept and technology are available to handle such input without organizationally dysfunctional side effects.

⁹⁰ "Improving: the long-term investment you make, the things you do today, to make the unit better tomorrow." FM 22-100, 1-6

⁹¹ Ulmer, 14

⁹² Ulmer, 16

Conclusion

The end of the Cold War and the conditions that fostered a Revolution in Military Affairs offered the US military a unique opportunity to maintain, in fact exponentially improve, its preeminence as the world's greatest military without expending the tremendous funds normally associated with military change. By all conventional standards our efforts have been successful, but we are starting to see strains in our fabric.

We are now at a fork in the road. New technology and systems have proven their worth in conflict and experimentation and are here to stay. Will we continue to use these systems to further centralize our decision-making processes in a quest for zero mistakes (in effect mortgaging the future for immediate gain), or will we use them to better our lateral transmission and speed of operations by placing them in the hands of subordinate leaders trained to use them?

When I see good junior leaders leave the service for the wrong reasons; when I see, but do not understand why we are discharging 33 - 37 percent of our young men and woman before the completion of their first term in service; when I see leaders focusing on form versus product; and when a premium is placed of short range, flawless execution versus establishment of well planned, systemic programs, I can not help but believe that we are letting our Service down. In his article, *Leadership in the 21st Century Army*, LTG Ulmer contends, "Competent military leaders develop trust, focus effort, clarify objectives, inspire confidence, build teams, set the example, keep hope alive, and rationalize sacrifice."⁹³ LTG Ulmer was expressing an ideal and the hope that the Revolution in Military Affairs has to offer. If we are to make those hopes a reality now and in the future, we, as military leaders, must effect change today. We must accept personal responsibility for our own actions, foster an atmosphere of trust and confidence, train our subordinates, then step back and allow them to act and lead. Finally, we need to hold

accountable those who abuse their power and fail to change. We have enjoyed a great history and have a bright future, but only if we display the courage, initiative, imagination, and determination upon which this nation was founded. Just as our fore-bearers during the inter-war period developed the new technologies and doctrine that enabled us to triumph in the Second World War, today's military leadership has an obligation to face the challenges of the 21st century. We should not do any less; indeed we can not do any less.

⁹³ Ulmer, 7

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