

Strategy Research Project

Developing Strategic Leaders in the NCO and Warrant Officer Corps

by

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Abstract

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Military leadership already seeks NCOs and warrant officers at the strategic level to serve as leaders and advisors. NCOs and warrant officers are expected to grasp, understand and interact in more complex and sophisticated situations. The purpose of paper is to address whether NCOs and warrant officers are suitable for these roles and determine if their participation at the strategic level of the military provides an essential and unique capability for the military. Senior NCOs bring a lifetime of experiences from every enlisted rank of the military to the strategic level. Further, the senior NCO is uniquely positioned and qualified to shape organizational culture among the enlisted ranks on behalf of the strategic leader. Warrant officers already use their combined leadership and technical expertise at the strategic level to impact organizational change and develop institutional improvements. Warrant officers must work with joint leadership to improve policies and educational options that align with the demands already placed upon them. Suggested recommendations are aimed at building a deeper “bench” of strategically minded and educated NCOs and warrant officers that are better prepared for positions at the strategic level of the military and government.

Developing Strategic Leaders in the NCO and Warrant Officer Corps

Non-commissioned officers and warrant officers fulfill important leadership and technical roles in the United States military. Traditionally, the role of a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) focuses on the tactical level of the military, providing leadership, direction and supervision at lower organizational levels. A warrant officer employs technical expertise in very specific areas. These traditional roles have served the military well and should continue. However, military leadership now seeks NCOs and warrant officers at the strategic level to serve as leaders and advisors. NCOs and warrant officers are expected to grasp, understand and interact in more complex and sophisticated situations. Assignments above Division level, such as Corps, Major Commands (MACOMs), Combatant Commands (CCMD), Departments of the Army (DA) and Defense (DoD) and NATO, include a broad range of duties and competing priorities. These positions require an understanding of the strategic environment. The purpose of this paper is to address whether NCOs and warrant officers are suitable for these roles and determine if their participation at the strategic level of the military provides an essential and unique capability for the senior leaders they serve and the subordinates they oversee. If their utilization at the strategic level is found to be essential, military leadership should take steps to empower senior warrant officers and NCOs to contribute successfully in this environment.

Defining Strategic Leadership

In order to perform a structured analysis of the role of senior NCOs and warrant officers in strategic leadership positions, it is prudent to start with an academically acceptable strategic leadership definition. The United States Army War College provides the following definition of strategic leadership:

The process used by a leader to affect the achievement of a desirable and clearly understood vision by influencing the organizational culture, allocating resources, directing through policy and directive, and building consensus within a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous global environment which is marked by opportunities and threats.¹

This definition will be used as the foundation of this analysis to determine whether senior warrant officers and NCOs effectively contribute at the strategic level. Essentially, if it can be determined that senior warrant officers and NCOs deliver valuable and unique contributions in any of these areas at the strategic level, then it logically follows that their increased participation at this level is both desirable and necessary.

Defining the Problem

The conversation on whether senior NCOs and warrant officers should be developed as strategic leaders typically focuses “how” the Army can better develop strategic leaders in these ranks. However, before looking at “how”, it is necessary to ask “why?” Military training, education, force structure and resourcing decisions are all based on validated requirements. Changes to education or force structure requirements must be justified before resources are allocated. Therefore, it is important to first address why the Army should invest its resources in developing strategic leader competencies in senior warrant officers and NCOs.

It is acknowledged that senior warrant officers and NCOs will never hold the actual strategic leader position in an organization. Warrant officers may command at lower levels, but not at the strategic level. This is not to say, however, that they do not need to understand strategic leader competencies. Leadership scholar Dr. Stephen Gerras notes, “Realistically, only one or two percent of the members of an organization will ever attain strategic leadership rank or position, but, anyone working directly for a strategic leader should be well-versed in strategic thinking concepts in order to

adequately support and advise the leader.”² It is within the context and responsibilities of these advisor and support roles that one must analyze whether strategic leader competencies are required for senior NCOs and warrant officers to be successful. With a valid definition of strategic leadership and an understanding of the problem, this document now explores if and how senior warrant officers and NCOs provide unique and relevant capabilities as strategic leaders in the military.

Preparing Strategic Senior Non-Commissioned Officers

There are a number of justifiable reasons for preparing senior NCOs for duties as strategic advisors and leaders. First, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) has made it DoD policy.³ CJCS Instruction (CJCSI) 1805.01 addresses critical capability gaps in the development of strategic level competencies in senior NCOs. The second reason is founded in a 2010 NATO recommendation to prepare senior NCOs as executives.⁴ These recommendations were provided to all NATO member nations and acknowledge the important role that NCOs perform in multinational environments. The United States has a responsibility to follow these recommendations as a leading NATO member-state. The final reason to develop NCOs as strategic leaders is posited by Dr. Kevin Stringer, an accomplished professor of international affairs and former military officer. In his article, “Educating the Strategic Corporal: A Paradigm Shift”, he states that in this time of persistent conflict, NCOs, rather than officers “will bear the main weight of interagency and intercultural interactions in current and future stability and counter insurgency operations.”⁵ While many of these interactions will take place at the tactical level by junior and mid-grade NCOs, these Soldiers will be led, trained and mentored by senior NCOs. Senior NCOs must understand the strategic level implications of actions

at the tactical level, as they are directly responsible for ensuring junior leaders engage appropriately in complex combat situations.

The Enlisted Professional Military Education Policy (EPMEP) was published by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) on October 28, 2005. It states, “While not mandated by law (as is the case for officers), this policy is a recognition that operating in joint, interagency, multinational, and coalition war fighting organizations and staffs requires that joint learning objectives must be made available to all enlisted personnel.”⁶ The policy further points out that different levels of Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) should be made available to all enlisted personnel at every stage of their career.⁷ This particularly applies to senior enlisted personnel, as they stand the greatest risk of being unprepared for key assignments at the strategic level.

The Chairman’s policy clarifies the requirement by stating, “We cannot wait until an individual is placed into a leadership position before providing the proper education and training.”⁸ Essentially, the U.S. military should prepare senior NCOs for strategic level positions before they are assigned to them.

The Chairman’s policy specifies senior enlisted learning areas that must be addressed in Enlisted Joint Professional Military Education (EJPME). These learning areas include 1) comprehend the process of formulating U.S. national security, strategic guidance, and doctrine, 2) integrate strategy, resources and contingency planning, 3) comprehend the Unified Command Plan, and 4) comprehend Service, joint, interagency, and multinational capabilities and how these capabilities are best integrated to attain national security objectives.⁹ Including these strategic learning areas as part of this policy implies a current capability gap and a validated requirement for

senior NCO utilization at the strategic level. This is, perhaps, the strongest argument supporting senior NCO strategic leader development in the DoD.

In October 2010, NATO leadership developed and published a *NATO NCO Strategy and Recommended NCO Guidelines* document. In this document, NATO leadership highlights that the complex multi-national environment “will create more demand on the NCOs of tomorrow to be functional in both their traditional responsibilities and in their ever-evolving roles.”¹⁰ It makes the key assumption that within NATO there will be “an increased demand for NCO’s who are prepared to work and succeed in a multi-national environment.”¹¹ NATO leadership, like the Chairman’s policy, recognizes that the fast-paced, complex operational environment of the future will require more leaders to understand and practice strategic level competencies.

The recommendations in the NATO document identify capability gaps in the NCO Corps of NATO countries. Among these gaps is a concern also shared by many leaders interviewed for this paper. The NATO document states:

NCOs arriving on operations or assigned to a multi-national military organization who do not possess a required level of leadership, knowledge, skills and abilities, or competence expected by a commander, can have a detrimental affect. This places the burden on other members of the organization to either train the individual or leave the NCO in the leadership role, with the hope that they will rise to the challenge. In the worst case, the NCO may be pushed aside and the duties given to another individual who can better meet the requirements.¹²

This highlights the adverse effect an unprepared NCO has on a complex, strategic organization such as NATO. It indicates the need to develop a common set of leadership, knowledge, skills and abilities an NCO requires for success in the multi-national environment.¹³ The same lesson applies to senior NCOs assigned to work in joint or interagency environments.

The NATO recommendations complement the Chairman's policy on Enlisted Professional Military Education in addressing critical capability gaps. These gaps exist because the Department of Defense already utilizes senior NCOs in strategic leadership and advisory roles, yet does not adequately prepare these individuals for success at that level. The validated requirement is to fill the preparation gap. This requires empowering NCOs with strategic leader competencies.

While at Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) Command Sergeant Major (CSM) (Retired) Mark Ripka was the principal leader in the development of strategic leadership education programs for senior enlisted soldiers.¹⁴ CSM Ripka commented during an interview that "U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) came to U.S. Joint Forces Command in 2002 and said there's a huge gap in terms of capability when a Command Senior Enlisted Leader (CSEL) joins an operational or a strategic level of war headquarters compared to when a commander does."¹⁵

In response, Ripka, along with the JFCOM team, developed CSEL educational programs in an attempt to address the capability gap identified by CENTCOM. Ripka commented, "It's the first time [it has] been recognized that senior enlisted and enlisted leaders across DoD can meaningfully contribute to the operational and strategic levels of warfighting..."¹⁶ Ripka successfully identified the critical need for senior NCOs to contribute at the strategic level. He then worked solutions that helped better prepare senior enlisted leaders to make that contribution.

The previous examples discuss three separate strategic level organizations, U.S. DoD, NATO, and CENTCOM, which have independently identified both the critical need and the existing capability gap of senior NCO strategic level participation. These

organizations saw the value of the senior NCO as a crucial player and combat multiplier for the strategic commander.

Many strategic leaders concur with these organizations. For example, Deputy Chief of the U.S. Army Reserve, Major General (MG) Marcia Anderson supports the important role of senior NCOs when developing policy at the strategic level.¹⁷ She notes, “To develop and implement policy without the insight of a senior enlisted advisor is a serious shortcoming because policies almost always impact the enlisted force, which is the largest population of the military.”¹⁸ Anderson believes the distinct advantage of the senior enlisted advisor is that he or she has served at every level of the military and understands what it means to live with policy decisions made at the highest levels.¹⁹ Anderson also realizes the existence of the same capability gaps identified earlier. She states “The current career path for NCOs does not prepare them to be effective at the strategic level. It is focused strictly on becoming good leaders, but not effective senior enlisted advisors above division level, even though they have the strong propensity to do so.”²⁰ Anderson’s perspectives complement those previously noted. She further justifies that senior NCOs bring unique and valuable contributions to the strategic level, but that the DoD must do more to develop and prepare senior NCOs for success in these assignments.

Another strategic leader that shares these viewpoints is United States Congressman Tim Walz. Congressman Walz is currently serving his fourth term in the U.S. Congress. He is a teacher and retired Command Sergeant Major who served overseas in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Walz believes that, among other capacities, the senior NCO provides the strategic leader a strong ability to influence the

organizational culture and promote the commander's vision.²¹ He states, "The obvious advantage is that senior NCOs can better articulate the strategic message to subordinate NCOs and Soldiers in the field. The senior NCO comes from a unique position of credibility when communicating with subordinates."²² One example Walz provides is communicating the Rules of Engagement (ROE) on the battlefield. He notes:

Senior NCOs are most effective at getting soldiers to understand that protecting the civilian population is of strategic importance. However, at home, the perception was that the ROE was hampering our ability to protect ourselves. It is my job as a Congressman to fix that [not the NCO's]. But the strategic message was that it was important to use restraint on the battlefield, and that message was best delivered on behalf of the commander by the senior NCO.²³

In this case, it is to the strategic leader's distinct advantage to leverage the unique position of the senior NCO to shape the organizational culture in order to prevent a potentially negative "strategic corporal" situation from occurring.²⁴

Returning to the definition of strategic leadership provided earlier, it is clear the senior NCO is uniquely capable of providing valuable contributions at the strategic level. Senior NCOs can and should have significant input on the development of policies and directives. Their unique level of credibility with the enlisted force enables them to effectively promote the commander's strategic vision and influence the organizational culture. In support of the Chairman's policy, it is suggested that more aggressive steps be taken to ensure the best-qualified senior NCOs are identified and better prepared to accept positions at strategic levels of the DoD. This will help ensure their unique capabilities and leadership attributes are leveraged to the organization's advantage.

Preparing Strategic Senior Warrant Officers

Senior warrant officers present a different situation for analysis when compared to senior NCOs. The case in support of senior NCO utilization in strategic environments

is based largely on their unique experiences and perspectives as enlisted leaders throughout their career, coupled with the fact that they represent a large enlisted population. The case for senior warrant officers serving as strategic leaders is focused on their technical expertise in their chosen field, as it is this technical expertise that the warrant officer corps is built upon.

The notion of developing warrant officers as strategic leaders is not without controversy, even among the warrant officer ranks. There are individuals from all ranks that believe warrant officers exist almost exclusively to fulfill the role of technical expert and that expanding that role blurs the lines between warrant and “O-grade” officers.²⁵

However, there is a shift in attitudes among the warrant officer population to those who firmly believe, in the words of Chief Warrant Officer Four (CW4) Wayne Baugh, that “in today’s environment, warrant officers can no longer afford to be just technical experts.”²⁶

Baugh points out, “Right or wrong, the roles of today’s warrant officer are being broadened. Many would say this is because of the operational environment, globalization, and cultural shifts in the Army.”²⁷ Clearly warrant officer roles are changing to reflect the rapidly expanding need for their technical knowledge and experience. In this constantly changing world, a strategic leader is well served by having strategically trained subject matter experts (SMEs). Warrant officers are technical SMEs that can intelligently shape policy and decisions at the strategic level based on their lifelong devotion to a specific career field.²⁸ They should be empowered for success at the strategic level, just like their senior NCO colleagues.

Unlike non-commissioned officers, there is far less institutional documentation that justifies warrant officer strategic leader development. There have been two

significant studies conducted on warrant officers since 2000. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) conducted a study published in February 2002 entitled “The Warrant Officer Ranks: Adding Flexibility to Military Personnel Management.” This extensive study was conducted in response to suggestions from policy makers and analysts “that the DoD might consider making greater use of the warrant officer ranks as a tool for attracting and retaining high-quality, skilled individuals.”²⁹ In the same year, an Army Training and Leader Development Panel (ATLDP) published the “ATLDP Phase III – Warrant Officer Study.” The Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) directed this study. Its purpose “was to examine and make recommendations on training and leader development tasks” as directed by the CSA.³⁰ The report “...is about the Army’s technician leaders, our tactically-expert trainers and advisors, and their commitment to the Army.”³¹ Each of these reports will be examined in greater detail.

The CBO report on warrant officers does not make specific reference to the development of warrants as strategic leaders or advisors. However, it does counter the position that a warrant officer can serve only narrowly defined roles. It states, “The paper finds that current law permits considerable flexibility in the management of warrant officers, flexibility that has allowed the services to use the warrant officer system in markedly different ways.”³² This finding indicates that any restrictions the services enforce on the utilization of warrant officers are self-imposed. The study concludes there is no legal restriction on broadening the utilization or professional development of warrant officers. Despite this flexibility, the study also points out that the services have a narrow view of the role of warrant officers. The study states, “The three services that employ warrant officers define their roles in essentially identical terms.

Warrant officers are the technical experts serving in positions that require the authority of an officer.”³³ It goes on to state, “Their assignments are repetitive in nature rather than offering the broadening experiences required as preparation for higher command.”³⁴ This is an accurate definition of how warrant officers are currently viewed and employed in our military today. Yet, the apparent flexibility in warrant officer utilization noted above presents an opportunity to expand this definition. Doing so may allow the services to better exploit warrant officer leadership and technical expertise at strategic levels.

The ATLDP Phase III – Warrant Officer Study covers a comprehensive range of issues in the warrant officer ranks including Army culture, training and education, manning, recruiting, and professional development. Like the CBO study, the ATLDP study mentions very little about the development of strategic leader competencies in warrant officers. This is for good reason. The ATLDP study revealed the warrant officer corps had many other pressing and basic issues to address which superseded senior warrant officer strategic development. Updates to the study and other documents indicate that many of these issues remain unresolved. However, conclusions can still be drawn from several findings and recommendations made by the ATLDP study.

Central to determining the developmental needs of warrant officers, and senior warrant officers in particular, is defining warrant officer roles throughout the Army. The ATLDP study concludes, “Responses from the field suggest that WO [warrant officer] roles and missions are not well understood throughout the Army and especially not by WO supervisors.”³⁵ It is reasonable to conclude from this comment that a primary reason warrant officers are not sought out for their advice at the strategic level is

because there is disagreement, if not ignorance, on the defined role of warrant officers at all levels. The ATLDP study further recommended the Army adopt a completely new general definition of a warrant officer, along with specific definitions for each of the five warrant officer ranks. The Army adopted the study's recommendations and published updated warrant officer definitions in Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600-3 "Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management" dated February 1, 2010.³⁶ The general definition is comprehensive and describes a warrant officer as a "technical expert, combat leader, trainer and advisor."³⁷ The specific reference in the institutional definition of warrant officers as leaders negates the notion that warrant officers are only technicians and systems experts. The Army states by definition that warrant officers are leaders. Therefore, warrant officers should be educated as leaders in a manner consistent with the leadership education and training afforded to "O-grade" officers and non-commissioned officers.

The determination that warrant officers are leaders as well as technicians, however, does not clarify whether warrant officers should attain strategic leader competencies. Returning to DA PAM 600-3, the definition provided for a Chief Warrant Officer Five (CW5) does not clarify whether senior warrant officers require strategic leader competencies. The definition refers to them as "master-level technical and tactical experts," but does not define what master-level means.³⁸ It does refer to a CW5 as "technical leader, manager, integrator, and advisor...[who] serve[s] at brigade and higher levels."³⁹ The lack of specificity in this definition creates the need to refer to actual examples of warrant officer employment at the strategic level to demonstrate the need to prepare these officers for such assignments.

There is valid justification that warrant officer technical expertise should be exploited at the strategic level. The most pressing reason is the rapid growth and relevance of career fields that are highly technical in nature. For example, Signal Corps Officers CW4 William Winkler and CW5 Todd Boudreau note in a recently published article “There are now senior Signal [branch] warrant officers in all facets of the DoD, DA staff, training centers, cyberspace, special mission units, and senior Signal organizations. Demand is expected to continue.”⁴⁰ With rapid advances in cyber technology and related Signal fields, a warrant officer devoted to technical competence in these fields becomes uniquely qualified to advise strategic leaders on the capabilities and limitations of these technologies. Winkler and Boudreau point out “One such example would be the DA G8 or G3 in which Signal [branch] warrant officers function at the O5/O6 level on a very senior staff that is immersed in strategy, policy, acquisition, and programs at the macro level.”⁴¹ Similar examples exist in other highly specialized fields such as intelligence, aviation and special operations, where the expertise of a warrant officer is relied upon more than ever before. In order to better prepare warrant officers for success as strategic level advisors, Winkler and Boudreau suggest warrant officers be afforded greater developmental opportunities. These opportunities include attendance at Intermediate Level Education (ILE) and advanced civil schooling in an effort to properly prepare warrant officers for the strategic level assignments they are beginning to find themselves in.⁴²

The logistics field is another area where strategic leaders are seeking the technical expertise and leadership of warrant officers. In an article published in *Army Sustainment*, CW4 Wayne A. Baugh describes the expanding roles of warrant officers.

Recognizing the unique capabilities of warrant officers, "...the CASCOM [Combined Arms Support Command] commander at the time, Major General Mitchell H. Stevenson, approved the addition of the three senior warrant officers to CASCOM's table of distribution and allowances (TDA)."⁴³ These warrant officers were assigned to CASCOM's Directorate of Lessons Learned and Quality Assurance (DL2QA) where they were charged to "look at Army sustainment from the top down, across the different levels of war: strategic, operational, and tactical."⁴⁴ As a result of this action, these three warrant officers interacted routinely with numerous strategic level organizations and generated dozens of substantive improvements...⁴⁵ The ability of these warrant officers to produce positive results and affect far-reaching organizational changes across the sustainment community indicates the potential that most senior warrant officers can bring to strategic level organizations. Baugh concludes by arguing that the Army must enable senior warrant officers to be successful at the strategic level by offering advanced educational and training opportunities not currently afforded to most warrant officers. He writes, "This will afford the Army's technical experts the opportunity to share their expertise and experience when operating within a joint and foreign environment. Warrant officers are capable of so much more than they are currently asked to do."⁴⁶

In summary, the institutional documentation on warrant officers offers many viable recommendations on their employment, management, assignment and education. Updates to the ATLDP study indicate that many of these recommendations have been implemented. However, military leadership has not adopted all of the recommendations in these documents, and published reports fail to identify or indicate the need to develop strategic leader competencies in senior warrant officers. Despite

this, actual examples of warrant officers performing at the strategic level, such as in the two examples previously provided, display senior warrant officers already contributing at high levels. These examples indicate a strong potential for warrant officers to be successful in strategic organizations. It should be noted that the authors and other senior warrant officers discussed in the articles were all graduates of professional military education not typically offered to warrant officers, such as Intermediate Level Education (ILE) or the Theater Logistics Studies Course (TLog), or had earned graduate degrees through advanced civil schooling. This further shows that with proper preparation, senior warrant officers are capable of effective and unique contributions in support of a strategic leader.

Recommendations

Having addressed “why” senior NCOs and warrant officers should be educated on strategic leader competencies, it is appropriate to make some recommendations as to “how” this could be accomplished. Building a deeper “bench” of strategically educated talent is a primary goal of these recommendations. However, just as with officer development, this does not mean all inclusive NCO and warrant officer development. Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (SEAC), USMC Sergeant Major Bryan Battaglia stated during an interview that not every NCO would be educated for duties the strategic level.⁴⁷ The same holds true for warrant officers. However, our institution would benefit from developing the policies, systems and programs that would build and track a deeper pool of well-qualified senior NCO’s and warrant officers educated on strategic leader competencies. The following recommendations suggest approaches for consideration.

Capturing and Recording Improved Strategic Competencies

The DoD does not currently have a comprehensive personnel database that captures the strategic education and experiences of senior NCOs and Warrant Officers. The first recommendation, applicable to both NCOs and warrant officers, is the development of methodologies that capture educational or assignment experiences an NCO or warrant officer achieves that better prepares them for assignments at the strategic level in a searchable personnel database. This will allow leaders and personnel managers to make more effective assignment decisions in strategic level organizations.⁴⁸ The basic ability to identify and screen for an individual that has been educated on strategic matters is critical to ensuring we receive the best return on investment made by the DoD in sending that individual to qualifying schools.

One possible option is the development of Additional Skill Identifiers (ASI) to readily identify those NCOs and warrant officers formally educated on strategic matters. This approach would need a focused team of professionals to develop and implement. The team would establish one or more ASIs and carefully develop the description for each one, to include the qualifications necessary to earn each ASI. Following the development of ASIs and the qualifications to earn them, the team should conduct a systematic review of all existing senior NCO and warrant officer billets in strategic level organizations to determine which positions should be coded with a strategic ASI.

Additional recommendations specific to senior NCOs and warrant officers follow. NCO recommendations focus on three areas. The first area focuses on a greater willingness to move between Command Sergeant Major (CSM) and Sergeant Major (SGM) assignments, while the other two promote increased educational and broadening assignment opportunities. As stated earlier, these recommendations are intended to

help “build a deeper bench” of senior Non-Commissioned Officers with strategic leader competencies.

NCO Recommendation 1 – Shed the Wreath

The senior U.S. Army NCO ranks have developed a strong culture of leadership and standards enforcement. The pinnacle of this experience is to achieve the Command Sergeant Major (CSM) rank and earn the right to wear the CSM rank insignia wreath. This is a tremendous achievement that all career enlisted members strive for and rightly hold in high regard. However, once the CSM rank is achieved, there appears to exist what can be referred to as a “Culture of the Wreath” in the Sergeant Major ranks. This is the strong reluctance for CSMs to take off the wreath at the end of their tour. The culture developed because of the difficulty in attaining a CSM position and the associated opinion that once the rank is earned, it should never be removed. While the desire to remain an organization’s senior enlisted leader is admirable, it is a cultural blinder to the experienced leader who could otherwise accept broadening assignments and educational opportunities that would enhance his ability to perform successfully at the strategic level.

One example of an NCO that was willing to remove his CSM wreath and accept a strategically broadening assignment is SGM William Zito. SGM Zito is a talented NCO with two successful tours as a battalion CSM. SGM Zito was selected to be one of only two Sergeants Major serving on Capitol Hill as a congressional fellow. At the time of this writing, SGM Zito served as the military fellow for U.S. Congressman John R. Carter (TX-31). His willingness to take off the wreath and pursue this challenging opportunity exposed him to strategic leadership at the highest levels of government. SGM Zito’s

experience serves as a strong example of how a qualified and properly identified senior NCO can perform successfully at the strategic level.

NCO Recommendation 2 – Increased Broadening Assignments

One potential reason for the “Culture of the Wreath” issue within the senior NCO ranks leads to the next recommendation. There are simply not enough challenging, broadening assignments available as a viable and career-enhancing alternative to CSM. The DoD should create and offer more broadening assignment opportunities similar to the position held by SGM Zito. These assignments should focus on building bridges between the services, other governmental agencies, and international organizations. There is a distinct advantage to expanding these opportunities beyond the officer ranks to senior NCOs. In a rapidly changing and complex global environment, the U.S. Government will benefit by improved relationships and an increased understanding of the U.S. military within non-military and international organizations. Senior NCOs have a unique approach and “down to earth” communication style that allows them to be highly effective in building cross-cultural relationships and understanding. Mr. John Stone, Chief of Staff for U.S. Congressman John R. Carter from Texas, concurs with this assessment, stating in an interview that senior NCOs provide unique insight, an enlisted Soldier’s perspective and exceptional work ethic at the strategic level.⁴⁹ The growing complexity of the strategic environment today suggests, and perhaps demands, that more broadening assignments in the interagency and international realms be created for well-prepared senior NCOs.

NCO Recommendation 3 – Formal Strategic Military Education

Perhaps the most critical component in developing strategic leader competencies in senior NCOs is education on strategic matters. A select group of nominative senior

NCOs (CSM and Senior Enlisted Advisor roles in strategic organizations) receive this in the Keystone course.⁵⁰ However, Keystone educates a very small population and does not “build a bench” of strategically-minded senior NCOs prepared to perform on strategic level staffs. DoD should seek additional methods to educate more senior NCOs in strategic leader competencies.

U.S. Army War College and other Senior Service College attendance is a potential solution to address the educational requirements for the development of senior NCOs specified in the Chairman’s EPMEP. Yet faculty capacity limitations and other resourcing considerations may prevent this from being a viable approach without considerable investment. However, the U.S. Army Sergeant Major Academy (USASMA) could emulate the U.S. Army War College (USAWC) in at least one aspect. The USAWC fills two programs through competitive selection early in the academic year. Roughly ten percent of the student population participates in these programs on a separate academic track for the last three to six months of the ten-month course. These select students focus more aggressively on complex strategic matters than the majority of students. These officers are specifically groomed for assignments at the highest levels of government. Using this advanced curriculum as a model, the USASMA could develop a three to four month strategic leader competency curriculum that would become part of the ten-month Sergeant Major Academy course. Filled through competitive selection, attendance in this strategic “track” could be a qualifier for the strategic ASI recommended above. This could further serve as a mechanism to identify those senior NCOs who are interested in and have an aptitude for assignments at the

strategic level. This approach reaches greater numbers and builds a deeper bench of NCOs educated on strategic matters and strategic leader competencies.

Senior NCOs should be considered for other educational opportunities that already exist in the current inventory of military schools such as the Basic Strategic Arts Program (BSAP). Per SEAC Battaglia, a select few NCOs have already attended Advanced Joint Professional Military Education II (AJPMEII) with great success.⁵¹ The DoD should assess all existing strategic level courses to determine if they are appropriate for senior NCO attendance. Once those courses that meet the strategic focused ASI criteria are identified, career managers could target Senior NCOs for attendance. As a result, the DoD will experience a much deeper bench of strategically educated NCOs who are prepared to succeed at the strategic level.

Recommendations for developing senior warrant officers with strategic leader competencies are similar to those for senior NCOs with one primary difference. The first recommendation discusses policy and regulation updates that more accurately describe and codify warrant officer roles. Other recommendations address deeply entrenched cultural beliefs about warrant officers and expanding the educational and broadening assignment opportunities for qualified warrant officers.

Warrant Officer Recommendation 1 – Education Policy Alignment

Warrant officer education policy should more closely align with the “O-grade” officer policy. This includes having warrant officer educational requirements codified in the Chairman’s Officer Professional Military Education Policy (OPMEP). Three key points clarify this recommendation. Those points are found in the definitions of an officer in Title X U.S. Code, the Goldwater-Nichols Act, and the ATLDP Warrant Officer Study cited earlier.

Title X U.S. Code definitions for an officer state, “The term officer means a commissioned or warrant officer” and “The term commissioned officer includes a commissioned warrant officer.”⁵² Warrant officers are specifically included in this definition as part of the larger officer community. Section 401 of the Goldwater Nichols Act of 1986 does not specifically preclude warrant officers from the directives contained within it and only uses the word “officer” throughout the act. One could reasonably conclude from these observations that there are no obstacles present in current law that specifically prohibits warrant officers from having their educational and professional assignment paths align with their “O-grade” officer counterparts. This includes joint education requirements that focus at the operational and strategic level. In fact, the documents suggest that warrant officers, clearly defined as an “officer” in Title X U.S. Code, must be educationally and professionally aligned with all officers in their respective services. This argument is the foundation for the following policy change recommendation.

The ATLDP study contains numerous recommendations to improve educational capability gaps. It further recommends that more be done to fully integrate warrant officers in to the officer corps.⁵³ While much has been accomplished since the report was published in 2002, one significant policy gap remains. For officers, the equivalent to the EPMEP is the Officer Professional Military Education Policy (OPMEP). The OPMEP was approved as CJCS policy in July 2009. Unlike the comprehensive nature of the EPMEP in regards to senior NCOs, the OPMEP fails to mention warrant officer professional development or education. Nor does it address senior warrant officer strategic leader development. This policy void at such a high military level represents a

warrant officer development gap. This policy gap exists despite the recommendations made in the ATLDP study. Senior Army leadership should seek to close this policy gap as a first step in addressing the role of warrant officers in the total future force, to include roles at the strategic level. Legislation drives policy and policy drives resourcing. There appears to be no legislative obstacles to aligning warrant officer educational requirements with the rest of the officer corps. However, policies do not yet exist within the DoD to drive the resourcing needed to realize the officer alignment recommended in the ATLDP study.

In addition to the policy improvements recommended above, working definitions of warrant officers in DA PAM 600-3 should also be improved. The ATLDP study recommended strengthening the definitions of warrant officers in DA PAM 600-3. This was accomplished, however the pamphlet's definitions of warrant officers, particularly the CW4 and CW5 ranks, should be further revised to reflect warrant officers strategic level service. This definition change will codify the requirement to properly develop warrant officers for positions at the strategic level.

Warrant Officer Recommendation 2 – Leaders AND Technicians

From a cultural perspective, warrant officers should address the internal cultural belief that a warrant officer is solely a technician. Many warrant officers believe they are strictly technicians and not leaders in the military. As a result, that is exactly what the O-grade officers appointed above them have come to believe. Senior warrant officer leadership must develop and implement a plan to “rebrand” the entire warrant officer corps in order to erase the old culture and replace it with a corps that believes warrant officers are both highly valued technicians and leaders at all levels of the military.

CW5 Phyllis Wilson, Command Chief Warrant Officer of the U.S. Army Reserve, spoke at a warrant officer symposium during the 2012 Association of the United States Army convention in Washington D.C. In her briefing, she emphasized the fact that warrant officers must embrace and seek development as leaders in their respective fields. She stated, "If an NCO is a leader, why would we abdicate leadership as a warrant officer?"⁵⁴ This comment points out an often-overlooked fact that most warrant officers come from the NCO ranks. As stated, the EPMEP provides guidance for NCOs to receive leadership training at all levels, including the strategic level. Warrant officers are former NCOs that display the talent and capability needed to perform the duties of a commissioned officer. It seems logical that warrant officers should be expected to perform at a higher level of leadership, and that they should receive leadership training similar to or in excess of that directed for NCOs in the EPMEP. As a stronger leadership culture evolves among warrant officers, the need for leadership development in warrant officer ranks will become more apparent and understood.

Warrant Officer Recommendation 3 – Warrant Officer Education and Assignments

While there is no DoD policy to support strategic level warrant officer education and broadening assignments, this should not prevent warrant officer leadership from pursuing and developing these opportunities while the policy gaps are addressed. The DoD should pursue warrant officer educational and broadening assignments in much the same way as described earlier for senior NCOs.

Warrant officers have already successfully attended ILE in limited numbers. While ILE is not a strategic level education, it builds a strong foundation in effective staff work that benefits warrant officers and the organizations they serve. If warrant officers are expected to align more closely with the officer corps as discussed, more warrant

officers should be provided the opportunity to attend either the ILE resident 15-week core course, or the distance education course offered through various methods.

DoD and DA should also broaden warrant officer strategic level educational opportunities in a manner similar to the NCO recommendations. These include developing challenging strategic leader competency tracks in the Warrant Officer Staff and Senior Staff Officer courses, and considering warrant officer attendance in other existing educational opportunities.

Strategic level broadening assignment opportunities should be expanded as well, focused in those areas where the technical expertise of a warrant officer can be leveraged. In order to improve relations and mutual understanding between military and non-military organizations, DoD should explore assigning warrant officers to other governmental and international organizations. These options must be pursued in order to promote warrant officer strategic leader competency development through broadening assignments.

Unique and Valuable to Strategic Leaders

As the world becomes more complex and interconnected, more senior leaders need to develop an understanding of the evolving global security environment. Senior NCOs bring a lifetime of enlisted rank experiences to the strategic level. This perspective is critical to the strategic leader making decisions affecting large numbers of enlisted forces. Further, the senior NCO is uniquely positioned and qualified to shape organizational culture among the enlisted ranks on behalf of the strategic leader he or she supports.

Warrant officers already utilize their combined leadership and technical expertise at the strategic level to impact organizational change and develop institutional

improvements. Leveraging these expanding roles, warrant officers must work with joint leadership to improve policies and educational options that align with the demands already placed upon them.

It is imperative that the DoD create personnel systems, strategic educational opportunities, and additional broadening assignments that fully prepare select NCOs and warrant officers for success as leaders and advisors at the strategic level. In doing so, these leaders are empowered to advise and support the vision and intent of strategic leaders. This will also enhance their ability to interact effectively with non-military and international organizations, which will improve U.S. military relations within these entities. NCOs and warrant officers are an essential and relatively untapped resource in this area. They are professionals with great talent and leadership capabilities. The Department of Defense should demand more of these individuals at the strategic level, while also providing the resources and educational opportunities required to ensure their effectiveness and success.

Endnotes

¹ Stephen J. Gerras, Ph.D. ed., *Strategic Leadership Primer*, 3rd ed. (Carlisle, U.S. Army War College, 2010), 2.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

³ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction, Enlisted Professional Military Education Policy, CJCSI 1805.01 (Washington, DC: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 28 October 2005), <https://www.mcu.usmc.mil/Military%20Education/EPMEP.pdf>, 1.

⁴ Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, Admiral J. Stavridis, US Navy and Supreme Allied Commander, Transformation, General Stephane Abrial, French Air Force, "NATO Non-Commissioned Officer Bi-SC Strategy and Recommended Non-Commissioned Officer Guidelines," memorandum with enclosure for NATO members and commanders, Belgium, December 13, 2010, <http://www.aco.nato.int/page325703721.aspx>, 1.

⁵ Kevin Stringer, Ph.D. *Educating the Strategic Corporal: A Paradigm Shift*. *Military Review* 89, no. 5 (2009): 87-95, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/225300070?accountid=4444>, 87.

⁶ CJCSI, EPMEP, A-1.

⁷ Ibid., A-1.

⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁹ Ibid., E-D-A-2 and E-D-B-1.

¹⁰ SAC-Europe and SAC-Transportation, NATO Non-Commissioned Officer, 2.

¹¹ Ibid., Enclosure p. 1.

¹² Ibid., Enclosure p. 3.

¹³ Ibid., Enclosure p. 3.

¹⁴ Command Sergeant Major (CSM) (Retired) Mark Ripka is an experienced senior enlisted strategic leader. He has served as the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) and was the first CSM of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).

¹⁵ "Newsmaker Profile: Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Ripka." US Fed News Service, Including US State News, Nov 05, 2007, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/468828064?accountid=4444>, 2.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1.

¹⁷ Major General (MG) Marcia Anderson is the Deputy Chief of the Army Reserve and leads the U.S. Army Reserve at the strategic level. She has commanded at every level of the Army, from platoon to division and is a practicing attorney. MG Anderson previously served on the staff of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

¹⁸ MG Marcia Anderson, Deputy Chief of the Army Reserve, U.S. Army Reserve, telephone interview by author, November 14, 2012.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ U.S. Congressman Tim Walz, United States Congress, telephone interview by author, November 14, 2012.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ The term "strategic corporal" refers to a situation where a lower ranking individual operating in a tactical environment commits actions that are significantly counter to the values of the U.S. military and, therefore, have far reaching strategic level effects. Examples would include an isolated incident of prisoner mistreatment, destruction of sacred religious documents, or the killing of civilians on the battlefield.

²⁵ The informal term “O-grade officer” was used frequently in numerous discussions and interviews the author held with warrant officers. It is the term used to describe an officer in the ranks of O-1 through O-10. In the past, the term “commissioned officer” was used, but now that warrant officers are also commissioned, this term has taken its place.

²⁶ Wayne A. Baugh. "Sustainment Warrant Officers' Expanded Roles." *Army Sustainment* 44, no. 1 (2012): 14-6, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1023459024?accountid=4444>, 14.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ CW5 Raymond Lutz, U.S. Army, Chief, Reserve Affairs Branch, Joint Special Operations Command, telephone interview by author, Ft. Bragg, NC, November 1, 2012.

²⁹ Richard L. Fernandez, *The Warrant Officer Ranks: Adding Flexibility to Military Personnel Management* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Budget Office, February 2002), 1.

³⁰ U.S. Army Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth, “The Army Training and Leader Development Panel ATLDP Phase III – Warrant Officer Study – Final Report”, July 18, 2002, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army/atld-panel/wo_report.pdf (accessed November 19, 2012), 1.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Fernandez, *Warrant Officer Ranks*, 2.

³³ U.S. CAC, ATLDP Phase III, 8.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ U.S. CAC, ATLDP Phase III, WO-7.

³⁶ U.S. Department of the Army, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management*, Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, February 1, 2010), 19-20.

³⁷ The full definition of a Warrant Officer, per DA PAM 600-3 is: The Army warrant officer (WO) is a self aware and adaptive technical expert, combat leader, trainer and advisor. Through progressive levels of expertise in assignments, training and education, the WO administers, manages, maintains, operates, and integrates Army systems and equipment across the full spectrum of Army operations. Warrant officers are innovative integrators of emerging technologies, dynamic teachers, confident warfighters, and developers of specialized teams of Soldiers. They support a wide range of Army missions throughout their career. Warrant officers in the Army are accessed with specific levels of technical ability. They refine their technical expertise and develop their leadership and management skills through tiered progressive assignment and education. U.S. DA, DA PAM 600-3, 19-20.

³⁸ Ibid., 20.

³⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁰ CW4 William Winkler and CW5 Todd Boudreau, "Senior Warrant Officer Specialized Positions", *The Army Communicator* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 56.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴³ Baugh, "Sustainment Warrant Officers", 15.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁷ SEAC Bryan Battaglia, Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, telephone interview by author, January 3, 2013.

⁴⁸ For the purposes of this recommendation, the "strategic level" refers to positions within a three or four-star staff, an interagency organization, congressional fellowship, or joint/multinational organization.

⁴⁹ Mr. John E. Stone, Chief of Staff to U.S. Congressman John R. Carter (R-TX31), interview by author, Washington, DC, October 23, 2012.

⁵⁰ Per the National Defense University Keystone course website, the course definition is as follows: The Keystone Course will educate Command Senior Enlisted Leaders (CSELs) currently serving in or slated to serve in a general or flag officer level joint headquarters or Service headquarters that could be assigned as a joint task force. CSELs will have an opportunity to visit and receive briefings at the National Defense University, the DJS J7 Joint Coalition Warfighting Joint Operation Module (JOM) in Suffolk, VA, and several Combatant Commands and Joint Task Forces. <http://http://www.ndu.edu/keystone/>.

⁵¹ Battaglia, telephone interview, January 3, 2013.

⁵² "10 U.S.C. § 101 : US Code - Section 101: Definitions", *FindLaw for Legal Professionals*, text file. <http://codes.lp.findlaw.com/uscode/10/A/I/1/101> (accessed December 9, 2012).

⁵³ U.S. CAC, ATLDP Phase III, 1.

⁵⁴ CW5 Phyllis Wilson, U.S. Army, Command Chief Warrant Officer of Army Reserve, "Warrant Officer Professional Development for Army 2020", briefing slides used during AUSA Convention presentation, Washington, DC, October 23, 2012.