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Military Transformation

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Abstract

The military has always been in a constant flux of transformation. From the beginning the military has transitioned from a ragtag military into an organized, combat ready force.

Transition always take place in the form of raising enlistment standards, getting a better type and quality of soldier, improving on the weaponry, better tactics, a more organized structure to meet current combat needs, and perceived future requirements.

Military Transformation

Soldiers are the only constant in the military; they are the easiest to obtain, but the hardest to keep. In the early years, Soldiers fought as ragtag militia and lost many Soldiers due to lack of tactics and weaponry. In recognizing that a better organized military would produce a better disciplined Soldier, they were trained in drill and ceremony, put through combat movements and tactics and issued new weapons and uniforms. Transition took place and a nation won its independence. Having no obligations to stay in service Soldiers returned home to their farms and the military contracted to a manageable size. In later wars Soldiers, recruited, organized and fought with even better equipment, gone was the single fire musket rifle; replaced by the repeating rifle and better tactics, structure and Soldier mindset.

The quality of the Soldier has always played a key role in the type of military and how it has been perceived by the public at large. During Vietnam, men were drafted, sent to a basic training site, then a combat finishing center and deployed into combat. The intent was to put as many Soldiers in uniform as needed to fight and win. The quality of the Soldier, the mindset of the Soldier, and the type of Soldier was not a consideration until later years. The military being short on Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) decided to produce what became commonly referred to as the “shake and bake NCO”. A quick and short course on tactics and leadership after basic and combat training produced thousands of NCOs for the war in Vietnam. At the same time, technology produced better weaponry, Agent Orange, rockets fired from airplanes; the M16, grenade launchers, better medical service and facilities and helicopters gave Soldiers a better fighting chance and increased survival rates.

It has been argued that the NCO Corp took a direct hit during the “shake and bake” years. Leaders produced through this program lacked the knowledge and experience to lead, causing

many unnecessary deaths. The argument was not that they were incompetent and unable to fight, but that the newly minted NCO came unprepared for the realities of war. Those NCOs that were able to quickly learn and adapt succeeded and advanced. The biggest critic within the NCO corp is the NCO themselves, but the lack of support from the nation for its returning Soldiers caused a further drain on military service. Service became a dirty word, service was for those individuals who could not function on the outside; service was for the minority and the poor. Military service was not for the educated, well off, or the well connected. Notwithstanding the military once more transitioned from a large force to a small and marginalized service. Budgets were cut and weaponry shelved, but not before battle results from the use of new weaponry were analyzed and incorporated into new technology for civilian use. Military tactics studied and incorporated into current training and into future war fighting plans, better training for Soldiers in and out of combat.

In the years prior to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) a war won on the back of technology. The military grew its Soldiers and incorporated new technology into units for use in a large war plan against a large enemy; in the end it was used in smaller combat operations such as Panama, Grenada, and Somalia. These being small engagements and limited in what type of Soldier was deployed into the theater of combat, produced a limited and small number of combat experienced leaders. Big army contained and NCO Corp where the majority of the NCO leadership was a peace time leader. Soldiers promoted through the ranks on bonuses; civilian education, administrative data, and appearance, yet more intelligent and better educated. Gone was the combat leadership skills acquired during war and the combat experience that resulted from war. It was the lessons learned, constant training, exercises, and theory that made the

NCO. These NCOs performed well when called to service during OEF and victory was quick and short.

Tactics learned from smaller scale conflicts allowed the military to successfully defeat an enemy in a short amount of time, by softening up targets prior to attack, the dismantling of enemy radar and communications grids sent the country into the ice ages. Precision strikes against targets left much of the infrastructure needed for rebuilding the nation. All this was done by utilizing technology so advanced and powerful that our enemy was not the only one who was “shocked and awed”. Our allies and the world realized that our technology afforded us the opportunity to devastate our enemies from a distance, minimizing our losses.

Victory was short because people came to believe that war could be won with only technology and no feet on the ground was required. The military was stripped of manpower; Soldiers were given money to leave the service, recruiting reduced and money spent on newer and better weapons. Leaders forgot that for a weapons system to operate, Soldiers were needed to push that button or to make the repairs when they broke down. For those who survived the downsizing, promotions were slower; training opportunities became fewer; becoming more of a caretaker military. This continued the development of a professional Soldier through academics within big army. Small army composed of those specialized units prospered with added training dollars, but at the expense of more deployments as the national policy of the United States changed to address international threats.

The beginning of the war in Afghanistan; quickly followed by the war in Iraq, the military found itself fighting on two major fronts and multiple small engagements throughout the world. All with an Army downsized, undermanned and over-tasked due to the previous learn years. Soldiers rose to the challenge and have overcome the stress and weight of multiple back

to back deployments. As a result this has created a force which has not had the opportunity to attend or complete education and schools required for promotion.

Junior Soldiers are making life and death decisions in the field of combat, depending on each other for support and finding new ways to overcome obstacles placed before them. Not since the world wars have enlisted Soldiers been weighed down with so much responsibility. As the nation enters its fifth year of continued war, Soldiers have come and gone, yet the number of new Soldiers entering the service has stayed the same.

Today as the military attempts to transform into a better, lighter, more lethal fighting force. Leaders have decided to make promotions easier and to promote without regard to experience and leadership in the form of automatic promotions for specialist to sergeant and sergeant to staff sergeant. Additional changes to the selection and promotion for senior enlisted Soldiers has demoralized those still waiting to be promoted. Senior enlisted leaders bemoan the loss of their input through promotion boards in selecting those Soldiers who will become tomorrow's leaders. The arguments sound similar to the shake and bake arguments made during the Vietnam era.

If one looks at the big picture and understand that Soldiers cannot be kept at the lower level ranks, because they have failed to attend a school or required training, when in reality war in itself provides a greater educational opportunity and real life experience that no school or training can provide. Once the military can provide a constant and manageable schedule Soldiers can attend those schools which provide the administrative education needed to be understanding leaders. A military not in transition is a nation in decline which will not survive tomorrow's threats. Once more Soldiers are the mainstay of a military and they are transforming themselves to meet the demands of combat and peace.

Looking to the past at how Soldiers of today are much better suited for combat today, one can appreciate and understand where the military is headed in regards to giving the nation future leaders with experience and drive to make things happen.

Conclusion

As the nation continues to be the policeman for the world, its military must stay constant and relevant. The greatest transformation and advances are made during war, with the stripping and hollowing out during peace time. Nations must accept that strong militaries create peace, advancements in technology and a better trained and equipped force allow for the projection of power without war. The Soldier is the main piece in any transition or transformation which without their ability to adapt and overcome, transition becomes a catch phrase of “we are in transitional mode” meaningless and without body.