

# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL Monterey, California



**Effective Leadership in TPU's:  
Findings from Interviews at 16 Units**

by

Kenneth Thomas  
Bob Barrios-Choplin

July 1996

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This report summarizes Phase 11 of a study of effective leadership behavior in company-level units (TPU's) in the U.S. Army Reserve. Extensive interviews were conducted in 16 high-priority (FSP) units, focusing on effective/ineffective leadership behavior by company commanders. Results underscore the fundamental importance of leadership to unit readiness and retention. The report identifies leader behaviors that influence readiness and retention by building five key conditions in the unit: training quality, standards, cohesiveness, confidence and respect in the leader, and support from spouses and employers. One finding involves the importance of the leader's time commitment to the unit. Another involves leader behaviors essential to managing unit training, including availability to subordinates, planning and delegation, and protecting the plan. Another includes a three-stage strategy for turning around units with low standards. Another involves identification of three leadership values that tend to produce trust and confidence: mission, standards/accountability, and soldier care. Concrete best practices are cited for each effective leadership behavior identified. The report also identifies two 'leadership traps' that several less-effective leaders fell into, involving micromanagement and punishment. The report concludes with several recommendations, including the need for leadership training.

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# **EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN TPU'S: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS AT 16 UNITS**

By

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**July 1996**

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The opinions expressed are solely those of the authors

## ABSTRACT

This report summarizes Phase II of a study of effective leadership behavior in company-level units (TPU's) in the U.S. Army Reserve. Extensive interviews were conducted in 16 high-priority (FSP) units, focusing on effective/ineffective leadership behavior by company commanders. Results underscore the fundamental importance of leadership to unit readiness and retention. The report identifies leader behaviors that influence readiness and retention by building five key conditions in the unit: training quality, standards, cohesiveness, confidence and respect in the leader, and support from spouses and employers. One finding involves the importance of the leader's time commitment to the unit. Another involves leader behaviors essential to managing unit training, including availability to subordinates, planning and delegation, and protecting the plan. Another includes a three-stage strategy for turning around units with low standards. Another involves identification of three leadership values that tend to produce trust and confidence: mission, standards/accountability, and soldier care. Concrete best practices are cited for each effective leadership behavior identified. The report also identifies two "leadership traps" that several less-effective leaders fell into, involving micromanagement and punishment. The report concludes with several recommendations, including the need for leadership training.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Units in the US Army Reserve are a major factor in battlefield success, serving as primary providers of combat service support for the Army and major providers of combat support. Especially important are those high-priority units designated Force Support Package (FSP) units--the focus of this study.

Leadership, in turn, is a key factor in the readiness of Troop Program Units (TPU's) in the FSP. One of the primary factors affecting unit readiness is the turbulence produced by low retention. However, an earlier literature review (Thomas, 1995) noted a lack of knowledge of how specific leadership behaviors related to retention and readiness in TPU's. This report describes the findings of a follow-up study of FSP leadership designed to provide that knowledge, focusing on the unit commander.

### A. The Study

The general staff of the US Army Reserve Command (USARC) were asked to select 16 TPU's that were representative of FSP units in terms of type of unit and geographic location, and evenly divided in terms of high or low attrition rates. Table 1 shows a breakdown of these units by type and by geographic region. For simplicity, we will refer to these units as companies, although a few were designated detachments.

Each company was visited on a drill weekend. Interviews were conducted with an average of ten members of the unit, including the commander and other officers, first sergeant and other NCO's, unit administrator and other full-time staff, soldiers who were due to ETS soon, and newly-enlisted soldiers.

Interviews were confidential and ranged from 30 minutes to 1 ½ hours. The interviewer asked questions concerning key conditions in the unit (described below). Interviewees were asked the current state of each unit condition, as well as what the company commander had done to create that condition.

### B. Value Added

In this study we have tried to avoid "rediscovering" the general principles of leadership already found in Army Field Manual 22-100, Military Leadership (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1990). Instead, this report identifies:

1. Behaviors of special importance to company-level leadership in FSP units in the US Army Reserve. (This setting provides special challenges not addressed in the manual, which is intended for the active Army as well.) Concrete "best practice" examples of these

behaviors are also woven through the report.

2. Theories that are helpful in understanding our findings.
3. "Leadership traps" into which some commanders fell.

TABLE 1. BREAKDOWN OF THE 16 FSP UNITS STUDIED

By Type of Unit

Adjutant General	2
Chemical	2
Engineering	3
Maintenance	1
Military Police	1
Quartermaster	3
Transportation	4

By Geographic Region (Time Zone)

Pacific	3
Mountain	3
Central	7
Eastern	3

## II. LEADERSHIP MAKES A DIFFERENCE

There was broad agreement that the company commander's leadership played a major factor in unit-level retention and in unit readiness. As one officer put it, "Leadership is the long pole in the tent." Other officers, full-time staff, and senior NCO's were particularly aware of the commander's influence on their unit, and were able to cite many specifics.

The attrition data used to select units did not prove to be a reliable indication of the quality of current leadership because of the time lag involved. These figures were based on the 12 months preceding the current drill weekend, and often diverged from current conditions in the unit--either good or bad.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it was not difficult to identify the effectively-led and less-effectively-led units in the study. After visiting several units, clear patterns emerged. Table 2 presents thumb-nail sketches of effectively- and less-effectively-led units.

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<sup>1</sup> Some gifted leaders going through turnaround situations, for example, had taken an early "hit" in attrition which stayed on the books for a year, despite low current levels. Some less effective leaders, in contrast, inherited low attrition rates from previous leaders despite high pending losses.

**TABLE 2. THUMBNAIL SKETCHES OF EFFECTIVELY-LED AND LESS-EFFECTIVELY-LED UNITS**

Effectively-Led Units	Less-Effectively-Led Units
Formations start on time	Formations often delayed--sr. NCO's and officers exchanging last-minute information
Few departures from training schedule	Many significant departures from schedule due to unforeseen developments
Commander seems unhurried, is available to staff and soldiers	Commander seems harried, operating in crisis mode, with people waiting to see him/her
Commander mostly out of the office, walking around, except for scheduled meetings	Commander is largely in office, responding to demands and doing paperwork
Soldiers are rarely seen standing about idly	Many soldiers waiting around for taskings or information (some dozing off)
Most weekends spent in field	Few weekends spent in field (other than annual training)
Bulk of training is in MOS skills, with much hands-on-training	Much of training is on common task skills, rather than MOS skills
Training plan is sequenced to build competencies for later field exercises and annual training	Training seems mostly guided by upcoming inspections, is easily deflected by battalion interventions, reactive to outside developments
Training sessions well-planned and executed, with necessary materials present	Training activities often repetitive, falling back on default activities needing little preparation (reading from manuals, NBC, etc.)
Few unexpected absences or rescheduled trainings (RST's)	Many unexpected absences, to make up during the week (RST)
Uniforms clean, pressed, are inspected at opening formation; no overweight soldiers	Some uniforms in poor condition; some obviously over-weight soldiers
People hold themselves accountable for outcomes	Frequent conflict and blame over poor outcomes

### III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 shows the general conceptual framework used here to organize our findings. It is based on the framework derived in the earlier report (Thomas, 1995), modified to reflect the findings of this study.<sup>2</sup> It is easiest to understand the framework by working backwards from right to left. The main outcome variable is unit readiness--the ultimate leadership goal of the company commander. Unit readiness is shaped by five key unit conditions: training quality, enforcement of standards, confidence and respect in the leader, cohesiveness, and support from spouse and employer. The first four of these conditions were seen as crucial to the unit's readiness and retention, while the last, support from employer and spouse, was generally seen as helpful but not crucial. Because of their importance, these unit conditions are proposed as key intermediate leadership goals for the company commander (Thomas, 1995). That is, the company commander needs to monitor these conditions in the unit, and adopt leadership behaviors that produce high levels of these variables. The central research question addressed in this report, then, is the identification of leadership behaviors by the company commander that shape these unit conditions.

The framework also recognizes the key role of the unit's enlisted retention rate in readiness. As shown in Figure 1, this retention rate is also shaped by the unit conditions in the framework, and in turn has feedback effects upon those conditions. For example, meaningful training causes more enlisted soldiers to remain in the unit, which then makes it easy to conduct more advanced and meaningful training for these more experienced soldiers (see Thomas, 1995). Likewise, unit cohesiveness causes higher retention, which means that unit soldiers have a longer history together, creating even stronger bonds. Thus, high unit-level retention can set up a self-reinforcing upward spiral in units, while low levels of retention

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<sup>2</sup>The following are significant changes to the original model. (a) Unit readiness has been added as the main outcome variable. The interviews made it clear that the unit conditions that increase retention are also seen as major factors in unit readiness. (b) Timely pay/benefits administration has been dropped from the list of unit conditions that are key factors in retention/readiness. It was clear from our interviews that the ADARS computerized pay system and direct deposit of paychecks (implemented earlier in the 1990's) have markedly reduced the number of pay/benefits problems and the speed with which they can be corrected. Contrary to earlier studies in the 1980's, no one reported significant problems in this area. (c) Enforcement of standards has been added to the list of key unit conditions. The previous report (Thomas, 1995) suggested the likely role of this normative factor, and interviews consistently confirmed its importance. (d) To save space, soldiers' decision processes have been omitted from the diagram, although they remain integral to the basic logic of the framework.

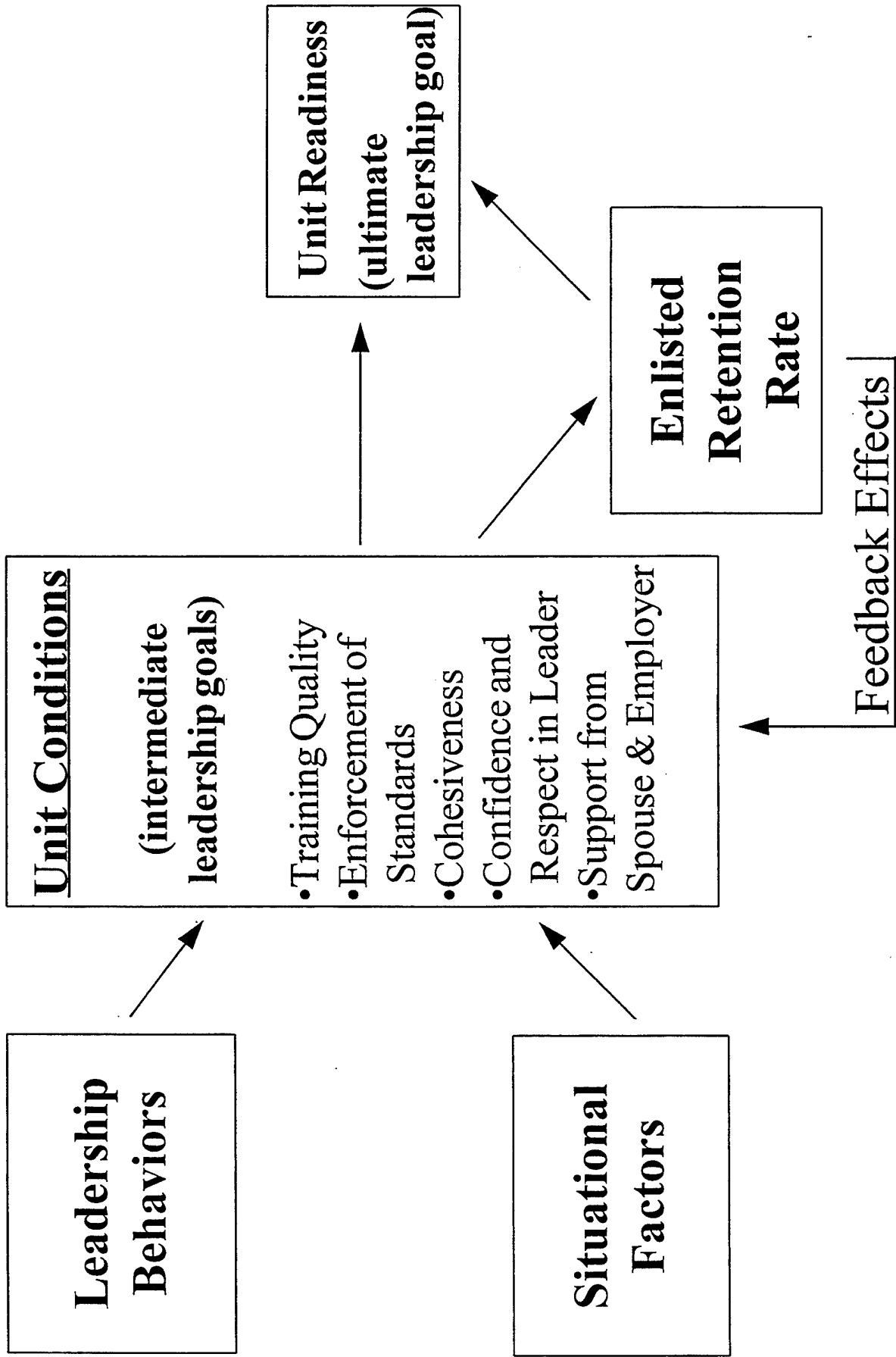


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for TPU Leadership

tend to set up downward spirals.

Finally, the framework acknowledges that various situational factors also influence the unit conditions in the framework. Such factors as the type of unit, availability of adequate training facilities, unit location, unit history, and characteristics of the unit personnel may create special leadership challenges or opportunities for the unit commander in trying to build favorable unit conditions.

#### IV. THE FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE OF LEADER COMMITMENT

The most apparent finding involved the sheer amount of time and energy required to be an effective unit commander. Commanders in our sample reported widely different amounts of time spent on unit business--from a low of four hours per week to a high of 24 hours.<sup>3</sup> These figures are based on non-drill weeks, and understate the actual workload on the commanders, since they do not include drill hours (MUTA's), the two weeks of annual training, or time away for schooling. The amount of time required was especially high for commanders trying to turn around units with low standards. One former commander who had successfully turned his unit around reported having spent an average of 40 hours per week during early stages of this effort. (This turnaround process is discussed in Section VI.) There was a clear, direct relationship between time commitment and effectiveness among the commanders in our sample. Being a TPU commander was experienced as a full-time responsibility, and as nearly the equivalent of a second full-time job by the most effective commanders. These effective commanders seemed committed to doing whatever was required to make their units truly ready and to bring these units up to standards. Some other commanders frankly told us that they would need to put in more time to do a first rate job, but were unable or unwilling to commit that much time. One commander estimated that it would take 15 to 20 hours a week to do his commander's job properly, but that he could only afford 9 or 10 hours.

In a number of units, we heard stories of former commanders whose time commitment had been limited primarily to putting in their drill weekends and doing well enough to "get their tickets punched." It seemed clear that the conversion of these units to FSP status, the perception that these units are more likely to be deployed, and increased attention and monitoring of these units by their chain of command and the Active Army, has made this "part-time" commitment no longer feasible.

Thus it seems especially important that prospective TPU commanders understand the level of commitment required of this position. Several of the more effective leaders in this sample had agreed to take on difficult, turnaround, assignments only because they were unmarried. Others reported the sacrifices they had to negotiate with their families, and their gratitude for having flexible civilian jobs and employers who supported their Army Reserve work.

In the sections that follow, we will present our findings regarding the specific leadership behaviors that were seen as building each of the key unit conditions in the framework.

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<sup>3</sup>We began asking this question after a few unit visits, so these numbers are based on the last eleven units visited. The mean number of hours per week for these units was 11.7.



However, it is important to remember that these are not labor-saving techniques or short-cuts. Nor will they work as an insincere facade. They require the high level of time and commitment we have tried to describe here.

## V. BUILDING TRAINING QUALITY

Here, we offer our findings on what quality training is, followed by a description of the leadership behaviors necessary to produce it.

### A. What is Quality Training?

Training is the general term for the work reservists do when not deployed. We found no significant differences between what the U.S. Army Reserve Command considers quality training and what enlisted soldiers found to be satisfying.<sup>4</sup> To help understand the characteristics of quality training, we apply a model of intrinsic motivation developed by Thomas and Tymon (1993).<sup>5</sup> Intrinsic motivation involves the rewards that individuals get directly from the tasks they perform. According to the model, those rewards come from an individual's sense of meaningfulness, progress, choice, and competence.

Meaningfulness is soldiers' sense that they are pursuing a worthy purpose--that they are on a path that is worth their time and energy, are on a valuable mission, and are doing something that matters in the larger scheme of things. In our interviews, training was seen as meaningful when it obviously contributed to readiness for the unit's primary mission. In particular, soldiers found training in their Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) to be especially meaningful--as opposed to Common Task (soldiering) training. Limited amounts of common task training were seen as meaningful, but soldiers resented not being able to give most of their attention to their primary MOS skills.<sup>6</sup> Training was also seen as more

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<sup>4</sup>This conclusion is based on extensive conversations with members of the FSP Readiness Office at USARC on these issues, specifically those individuals on the general staff who visited FSP units to help improve their training: Maj. Joe O'Connor and Capt. Rob Doane.

<sup>5</sup>This model is also being used by the Eighth Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (8QRMCM). For a description of this model prepared for 8QRMCM and a general discussion of its application to the U.S. military, see Thomas and Jansen (1996).

<sup>6</sup>One engineering company in our sample had been forced by a higher command to focus exclusively upon common task training for over a year. The results were disastrous in terms of attrition rates. In one sergeant's words, "I couldn't pick up a hammer for over a year!" This emphasis on primary mission is also consistent with the FSP Readiness Office's philosophy. Upon deployment, Reserve units routinely have additional days to polish their common task training stateside while their equipment is being shipped abroad. When facing the reality of deployment, motivation to attend seriously to common task training is also reported to be

meaningful when it was hands-on (that is, involved actually performing the activity rather than learning about it) and accomplished something of value for a "customer." In the Army Reserve, the term "HOT training" (hands on training) refers to both. Thus, Engineers especially enjoyed building roads or buildings for their communities or other units (as opposed to building something in a parking lot and tearing it down afterward) and Personnel units enjoyed working on personnel files for other units. (Notice that such training requires more time away from the drill center and more coordination with other organizations, as discussed below.)

Progress is the soldiers' sense of accomplishment as they move forward on a task--the sense that their activities are really accomplishing something and that they are "going somewhere" (as opposed to spinning their wheels). Soldiers seemed most aware of progress when their training was organized into a plan with milestones along the way. For example, each set of activities would be designed to produce the skills necessary to perform still more complex tasks that would then enable them to do something particularly challenging at their two-week Annual Training (AT). It was important that the plan was actually adhered to, so that the training sessions were not seen as "wasted." Additional feelings of progress came from HOT training that produced visible products or appreciation from customer organizations.

Choice is the soldiers' sense that they are able to use their own best judgment to accomplish a task--to select task activities and perform them in ways that make sense given their understanding of the task purpose and standards. In our interviews, NCO's commented repeatedly on the need for commanders to "let them do their jobs" to execute the scheduled training. E4's told us of their pride to be conducting a significant amount of training in well-led units. In general, delegating authority downwards allowed soldiers to take calculated risks, learn from mistakes, develop their decision making, and experience more ownership of the task.

Competence is the soldiers' sense that they are skillfully performing task activities and that they are doing good, quality work on a task. The sense of competence was especially apparent in soldiers' stories of progressively more challenging tasks that they had been able to perform and master. Soldiers' pride in their competence also seemed to depend on leaders demonstrating that performance quality mattered, so that they were held accountable for quality work. Soldiers repeatedly told us that they appreciated it when a commander they respected was visible in their areas to see how training was going, interpreting this as a sign of interest in, and caring about, the quality of their work. Since training also includes decision-making and leadership activities by NCO's and junior officers, feedback and mentoring on these topics were also highly valued. Forms of public recognition

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considerably higher.

and awards also provided tangible evidence of competence.

## B. Leadership Requirements for Quality Training

We are using the word "leadership" in a relatively broad way, to capture different important facets of the leader's behavior.<sup>7</sup> In this section, we offer our analysis of leadership behavior required to produce the kind of quality training outlined above. On the whole, these behaviors are concerned with the coordination of a complex set of tasks in a demanding environment. Our analysis is based largely upon Galbraith's (1973, 1974) information-processing model.

### 1. The Demanding Nature of This Setting.

U.S. Army Reserve units are held to the same high standards of readiness as their Active Component counterparts. However, training time is much more limited--two days a month plus a two-week Annual Training. This shortage of time is key to understanding the TPU commander's challenge. Commanders spoke of the "38-day reality" or of "fitting 40 hours into a 16-hour weekend." In short, there is almost no slack in this system. Commanders have to prioritize and plan carefully to utilize the limited training time.

In addition, there are a great number of uncertainties that make it difficult to carry out plans. Many of these are from the soldiers in the unit. Since they are not full-time members, they often encounter unexpected time demands from their civilian employers. They also commute sizeable distances, experiencing car breakdowns and traffic jams. Finally, they are free to walk away from the unit at any time if their job or family situation changes, or if they simply become dissatisfied with the unit.

Other uncertainties come from outside the unit. Meaningful, hands-on training usually requires coordination with a variety of organizations--customers, suppliers of equipment and transportation, local governments, training facilities, and higher commands.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Our broad use of the word corresponds to its use in the units we visited. In the academic literature, "leadership" is often used in a more constrained way. For example, in management theory, leadership is often described as one of four management "functions": planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. In the field of organizational behavior, leadership is often confined to a still narrower range of behavior, involving issues of decision making styles or styles of emphasizing task and people concerns.

<sup>8</sup>We heard many complaints about multiple levels of higher commands that insisted on approving company off-site training, but were slow in approving or denying the commander's requests. In one case, a unit was two months away from AT but still did not know

In addition, FSP units are especially prone to short-term requests from higher-level commands who are strongly interested in their readiness. Thus, there are many visitors on drill weekends, requests for briefings to higher commands, and short-notice taskings. The severe time limitations in Reserve units make these disruptions more costly as compared to Active units by roughly a factor of 10. That is, in Reserve units, a lost day represents 50 percent (one half) of the monthly training schedule; whereas in Active units it would represent about 5 percent (one twentieth).

2. Effective Leaders Are Available to Subordinates.

These units face so much uncertainty that unit commanders must avoid adding to it by being unclear about how things are to be done. Thus, new commanders needed to spell out their policies, rules and procedures for subordinates to follow. Even more importantly, effective commanders were available and approachable for subordinates who had questions about these procedures or encountered situations where their application seemed problematic. Our interviews showed several cases of senior NCO's who found the commander's guidance vague, but were nevertheless blamed for perceived deviations from that policy. One more successful commander went out of his way, in contrast, to tell his subordinates that he fully expected them not to understand all of his guidance--perhaps even after repeated explanations. He promised to keep explaining when this occurred, and in return he held them accountable for asking questions when they did not understand.

Clear policies enabled the unit's full-time staff to handle a number of unit issues on their own between drill weekends. However, with the uncertainties facing the unit, many issues came up during the month that had to be referred to the commander. Effective leaders made it a point to be quickly reachable by the Unit Administrator (full time administrative person) to respond to urgent issues and often called the unit to check in. They tended to stop by the unit frequently to confer with full-time staff and to work on issues that the staff had flagged for them. They also made it a point to do their own administrative paperwork before and after the drill weekend, so that they could be available to subordinates as needed during the drill weekend. Finally, they tended to have standard procedures for checking with platoon leaders and the first sergeant regularly between drills. All of these contacts provided mentoring opportunities as well as unit coordination.

Without this availability, full-time staff and other subordinates were unable to transact much of the unit's work between drill weekends, or made mistakes that

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definitely how long the AT would be, so that the commander did not even know how many soldiers would be able to attend and how much equipment to take. During the last half of our interviews, this situation was compounded by the standing up of the Regional Support Commands, which created a "black hole" in the approval process for many commanders.

needed to be corrected later. There was also a large backlog of issues and a "paperwork blizzard" waiting for the commander on the drill weekend--and lines of people waiting for guidance. One commander recalled, "When I first came here, I had 30 guys lined up outside my office."

### 3. Effective Leaders Plan and Delegate.

Even putting in long hours, the commander has a limited capacity to handle decisions that are referred up the hierarchy. Effective leaders in our sample were able to push down more of these decisions to their subordinates. Several used the word "empowerment" to describe this process. Empowering subordinates reduced the load of operational decision making on commanders, freeing them for other activities like detailed planning, mentoring, "training the trainers," and walking around to observe training. It also enabled subordinates to practice and develop their own decision making and leadership skills.

The amount of delegation depended in part upon the commander's trust in subordinates. Thus, effective commanders delegated less in the early stages of "turnaround" tours, and delegated more in later stages after soldiers had internalized higher standards. (See Section VI.B.)

Effective delegation also required the development of detailed training plans. These plans (together with unit standards and procedures) provided NCO's with the information needed to handle the decision-making authority delegated to them. All units are required to have yearly, quarterly, and monthly training plans. However, these plans differed in quality. In effectively-led units, as noted above, the plans built cumulatively toward the commander's vision of unit readiness. Each training exercise provided a foundation for the next, more complex, exercise, leading eventually to the most challenging exercises at AT--"the unit's superbowl," as one commander put it. To enable effective delegation, these training plans also had to spell out the responsibilities for each platoon in enough detail to serve as a blueprint for that platoon. These responsibilities, in effect, were detailed targets or goals for each platoon which, if met, guaranteed effective training for the unit as a whole. Platoon sergeants could then be delegated responsibility for making operational decisions to meet those goals in the way that made most sense to them. Training meetings during drill weekends provided an opportunity for each platoon to clarify its responsibilities and to voice its requirements from other platoons. Nailing down these details was especially crucial for more complex, off-site training exercises.

Without this planning and delegation, senior NCO's were unable to make informed decisions. Commanders were forced to make a very high number of operational decisions--in essence becoming micromanagers. And again, there were long lines of people waiting to see the commander--with much idle time. While waiting for guidance, senior NCO's were forced to "wing it" on their own for their own squad and platoon training.

Complex training exercises proved infeasible, and the unit settled for simpler training in the drill hall. The lack of delegation also prevented NCO's from demonstrating their capabilities to the commander, which seemed to reinforce the commander's lack of trust in his subordinates and his felt need to continue to make a majority of operational decisions himself. We observed a number of commanders who seemed to be caught in this downward spiral of low trust and micromanagement, which seemed to be an important leadership trap for unit commanders. As one effective leader put it, "Micromanagement will snowball on you."

#### 4. Effective Leaders Protect the Plan.

As noted earlier, all units are required to have training plans. However, less-effective units seemed routinely to have to depart from their plans. The plans seemed to have the quality of a hope or best guess. In effectively-led units, in contrast, the commander went to considerable effort to protect the plan from disruptions--both inside and outside the unit. Inside the unit, these commanders collected a great deal of information about how well training plans were being executed on drill weekends by walking around, talking with soldiers and observing events. In addition, they held their staff, first sergeant, and platoon leaders accountable for meeting their responsibilities. Deviations were taken seriously, and were the subject of follow-up meetings to learn from and correct the problem. Between drills, these leaders received regular briefings on preparations for the drill weekend--sometimes including phone calls from platoon leaders verifying the number of soldiers who would be attending.

Most dramatic was the need for effective commanders to occasionally protect their training plans from higher level commands--most often from their battalion commander. Effective commanders did not easily accommodate short-term taskings that would damage their plans, and thus their readiness for later exercises and their AT. As one effective commander put it, "I'm not here to make my battalion commander happy." These commanders reported having to say, "Sir, I cannot support you," with explanations, on several occasions. Here, having a tightly-linked plan for meaningful training provided a convincing rationale. "My soldiers are loading trucks for next month's convoy to Fort Collins." When faced with orders from Battalion, commanders could pull out the training schedule and ask "What would you like me to give up?"

In general, more effective leaders also protected their plans by proactively networking with other units that they depended upon. Several took the time to visit these organizations, educate them about the unit and its training needs, and ask them to visit their unit--especially on special occasions (dining-ins, dining-outs, ceremonies). They went to greater lengths to win support for their training plans from headquarters, established personal relationships with recruiters to help them obtain quality personnel on a timely basis, and so on.

We were also impressed that effective commanders protected their plans

from being overwhelmed by the Operational Readiness Examination (ORE), administered by a branch of the Active Army.<sup>9</sup> Effective commanders viewed this exam as useful feedback, but generally felt that if they followed their training plan the unit would do well on the exam anyway. Less effective commanders, in contrast, often allowed the ORE to dictate their training schedule for several months prior to the exam. In one such unit, soldiers generally felt that the time had been wasted, and attributed their efforts to the commander's desire to look good for promotion.

5. The Alternative is Defaulted Standards.

When the commander was unavailable to subordinates and was unable to plan, delegate, and protect the plan, the unit was unable to meet all its responsibilities. The company simply defaulted on at least some acceptable standards of performance. Training quality and readiness declined. Deadlines (suspense dates) for reports were missed or report quality was substandard. Mentoring, schooling and promotions were neglected. Equipment maintenance suffered, and weight and physical training problems were not monitored or flagged for action. Attrition figures rose. The more effective leaders in our sample commented that NCO's and junior officers in these poorly-led units also learned dysfunctional leadership patterns that would likely cause similar problems in other units.

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<sup>9</sup>Much of this exam is a paperwork check of personnel records, vehicle maintenance records, etc. Commanders tended to feel that it was focused largely on "dotting i's and crossing t's" in these records. The stance of viewing exam results as useful information rather than a primary measure of readiness or a primary training goal is also recommended to commanders by members of the FSP Readiness Office in the USARC.



## VI. BUILDING STANDARDS AND COHESIVENESS

The two unit conditions involving standards and cohesiveness will be discussed together here. These two sociological factors combine to form the "normative" forces in the unit that shape soldiers' quality of performance. "Normative" refers to perceptions of the rightness or wrongness of behavior--of what soldiers believe they should do. It involves notions of duty, honor, fairness, and doing the right thing.<sup>10</sup> Cohesiveness is the strength of the force that holds the unit together--the attractiveness of the unit to its members.

Figure 2 shows the classic sociological description of the manner in which performance standards (norms) and cohesiveness interact to shape unit performance.<sup>11</sup> When unit members find the unit highly attractive, they are especially likely to honor its norms. Thus, high performance occurs when there are both high performance standards and high cohesiveness in a unit. Several effectively-led units in our study had attained this condition.

However, we also found a number of commanders who were trying to turn around units with low performance standards. In the remainder of this section, we will describe the characteristics of these units, leadership behaviors for building standards in these units, and then behaviors for building unit cohesiveness.

### A. "Good Old Boy" Units

There was much agreement between the stories told to us by commanders who had taken over these units. The units had been neglected by their previous commanders--in some cases by several generations of commanders. Army standards had not been enforced by these commanders, and the units developed lower performance norms. Over time, soldiers in these units (especially senior NCO's) had accepted these lower standards as proper, as part of an arrangement to which they felt entitled. Field manuals were seldom consulted for guidance, with NCO's making up their own procedures and teaching them to junior enlisteds. Often, senior NCO's (usually the Unit Administrator) had become the de facto leaders of these units. Upon taking command, new commanders were informed of this fact: "We pretty much run the unit. Don't worry sir, we'll take care of you." One was told flatly by his UA, "I run this unit. This is my unit."

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<sup>10</sup>For more description of the distinctions between sociological, psychological and economic influences upon behavior, see Thomas (1995).

<sup>11</sup>This relationship was originally formulated by Seashore (1954), and is still basic to sociological descriptions of work groups.

		GROUP COHESIVENESS	
		HIGH	LOW
PERFORMANCE NORMS	HIGH	HIGH PERFORMANCE	MEDIUM PERFORMANCE
	LOW	LOW PERFORMANCE	LOW PERFORMANCE

Figure 2. Effects of Cohesiveness and Performance Norms on Group Performance (From Seashore, 1954).

With relatively low military standards, "getting along" (cohesiveness for its own sake) tended to be valued in these units--especially among senior NCO's. Retention at that level tended to be very high, with many approaching mandatory retirement. There was a significant degree of cronyism--with desirable schooling and other favors given to friends. In some cases, there were reports of falsifications of records to protect overweight friends, friends who could not pass physical training tests, or to maintain the appearance of equipment readiness.

For junior enlisteds, however, there was often high turnover in these units. Attrition had been reportedly at 100% in one of these units, despite the high retention of senior NCO's--implying that junior people were turning over more than once per year on average. New recruits, in particular, were disillusioned and sometimes disgusted after arriving at such units following their basic training. Many of these young soldiers spoke with great emotion about how their lives had been turned around in basic training--how they had learned self-esteem and discipline, and expected to serve their country with honor in the Army Reserve. In these units, on the other hand, they found a lack of discipline, integrity, challenge, or worthwhile work. One said that the NCO's in the unit were nice enough and would probably do their best to protect him if deployed, but that he did "not have much confidence that they would know how." Others resented the favoritism and the fact that there were few promotion opportunities beyond E4, since senior NCO's did not retire. Still others resented having to carry most of the workload while senior NCO's relaxed on the job.<sup>12</sup>

Commanders told us that these units had reputations within the local Army Reserve community. One first sergeant used the term "renegade unit" to describe his unit's former reputation. It appeared to be difficult to recruit new commanders for these units.

#### B. Leadership to Rebuild Standards

We conducted a supplementary interview with a former company commander (now a battalion commander) who had established a reputation within USARC as an expert in turning around problem units. His ideas on this topic were consistent with those of

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<sup>12</sup>We heard many stories about senior NCO's who had "retired on the job" and no longer carried their share of the unit's workload. Junior enlisteds were angry and frustrated at having to perform work while these NCO's sat in plain view, drinking coffee and chatting about sports. Soldiers told stories about having to pitch the NCO's tents for them when the NCO's themselves were idle. One soldier was going to leave the unit in part because of an incident in which he and other enlisteds were called out of their barracks late at night to load a few rifles into a truck while a roomful of sergeants watched.

successful company commanders in our sample. We have organized this section around the three stages he identified.<sup>13</sup> The stages overlap somewhat in practice, but the emphases are distinct.

Stage 1: Taking Control and Evaluating.

This initial stage was the most turbulent and psychologically demanding for commanders, but also the most critical. They regained control of the unit, put it back on track toward high standards, and performed the evaluation and diagnosis necessary for stage 2.

Commanders began by making a clear statement of their standards and leadership philosophy. Here, commanders spelled out the implications of being an FSP unit. They emphasized the likelihood that the unit would be deployed and the absolute need for the unit to be ready for that deployment--both to accomplish their mission and to bring back its members alive. This need provided the backdrop for enforcement of Army standards. Commanders spelled out the philosophy that they would use to lead the unit to a high state of readiness, trying to set clear expectations about their style and methods.

Senior NCO's in these units had heard such speeches from previous commanders who had not followed through on standards, and were commonly skeptical at this point. So it was vital that the commander begin setting and enforcing standards. Common abuse areas involved rescheduled training (RST's), physical training, and weight. Commanders published the official Army standards on these issues and often took personal control of their enforcement at this stage.<sup>14</sup> For example, a soldier noted that permission to miss a drill weekend and reschedule training (RST) for a later time had formerly been "passed out like Santa Claus passing out candy." The new commander reversed this practice by enforcing policies that severely limited RST's, reviewing all RST decisions personally, giving unauthorized absences to people who missed drills without advance notification, and giving authorized absences (without pay) to people who did give advanced notice.<sup>15</sup> Attendance increased dramatically, allowing more meaningful training. With respect to physical training and weigh-ins, commanders often brought in outside evaluators to ensure objective assessments with respect to standards. Likewise, commanders personally reviewed personnel

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<sup>13</sup>We have relabeled these stages for clarity, but have maintained their content. Most of the specifics discussed under each stage were obtained from successful company commanders in our sample, rather than from the expert.

<sup>14</sup>This was less true for commanders who come to the unit with a new first sergeant whom they trusted.

<sup>15</sup>Our turnaround expert noted that in his current battalion, RST's went from 150 per drill weekend to only 10.

records to insure that problem cases were flagged for counseling and action.

Commanders emphasized the need to expect resistance at this stage, especially from senior NCO's. New commanders were challenging the old norms and (low) standards that these senior members of the unit had come to accept as proper. These senior NCO's commonly called in Inspector General (I.G.) teams when commanders began to enforce official Army standards.<sup>16</sup> Such I.G. visits helped the new commander by legitimatizing those standards and backing up the commander's decisions.

During this stage, commanders assessed the current training plans and made any immediate changes that proved necessary to correct gross deficiencies. They also collected first-hand data on the status of equipment readiness, weapons qualifications, familiarity with field manuals, suspenses, promotions, schooling, and soldier care. With respect to soldier care, new commanders commonly conducted separate "sensing" sessions with junior enlisteds (E-1 through E-4) and senior enlisteds (E-5 and up). Among other things, these sessions surfaced areas of abuse or neglect of junior enlisteds--the level at which attrition had been highest, and where basic and MOS training had most recently instilled high standards. It was especially important to stop these abuses. One commander's message in counseling sessions was especially clear: "You mess with my junior enlisteds, you mess with me." Officers were also counseled and evaluated to understand their abilities and motivation to support the new program.

Effective commanders spelled out a number of useful attitudes that had helped them during this stage. The first was, "Come in tough [firm], then you can lighten up." The second involved the need to be fair to all members of the unit--including the most resistant ones. Thus, many commanders mentioned the need to be "firm but fair." Here, it was useful to keep in mind that the lowered standards were not primarily the fault of these NCO's, who had attempted to fill the leadership vacuum formed by years of neglect by previous commanders. It was also useful to realize that these NCO's were held in high esteem by many members of the unit. In this setting, being fair meant treating these senior NCO's and others with the respect due their status and experience: "You have to respect anyone who's been in twenty years." So effective commanders listened to the views of these soldiers, tried to convince them of the necessity for the higher standards, and in general tried to win them over to become successful allies in the rebuilt unit--but without compromising Army standards. In contrast, some less effective commanders fell into the leadership trap of trying to be "tough"

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<sup>16</sup>Some of these I.G. incidents served to dramatize how, over time, unit members could come to accept conditions as proper that were widely divergent from USAR standards. We heard stories of fraternization and gross obesity, for example, in which offending soldiers called in I.G. teams for (unsuccessful) support when a new commander began to enforce standards.

and "drive out the lazy ones." These commanders criticized or punished senior NCO's (and sometimes the whole unit) in public, stopped listening to soldiers, and were seen by unit soldiers as "playing gotcha" rather than trying to make soldiers successful. As a result, these new commanders were seen as tyrannical and failed to win the support of most of the command.<sup>17</sup> (For more on this trap, see Section VII.C.4.)

Nevertheless, despite commanders' best efforts to be fair and to "salvage" existing personnel, significant losses of personnel seemed inevitable during this stage. Some individuals left because they were afraid of deployment, others because of the new standards, and some were counseled out. On the whole, those who left were seen as significantly less valuable assets than those who remained. Effective turnaround commanders were willing to take this "early hit" in attrition in order to improve the unit. They also made sure to prepare their superiors for these losses and to get advance approval for their turnaround strategy.

### Stage 2: Rebuilding.

The emphasis in this stage was upon systematically setting and attaining standards in all areas of the command--and setting up the management/leadership structures needed to support this. Much of this stage, then, involved the leadership activities discussed in section V. Workable standard operating procedures were established and detailed plans and standards/goals were set for different areas--including training, equipment readiness, weapons qualifications, and meeting suspenses. Mislaidd field manuals were located or reordered, and soldiers were required to master them. Standards of professionalism were also set.<sup>18</sup> People were held accountable for these goals. As junior officers and senior NCO's demonstrated their commitment and ability during this stage, they were given progressively more authority to make the decisions necessary to achieve these goals. Gradually, accountability and empowerment were pushed down to lower and lower levels in the command, freeing more of the commander's and senior NCOs' time for planning and mentoring. Commanders reported that attrition began to decline steadily at this point.

As part of enforcing standards, this phase involved more systematic counseling of subordinate officers and NCO's. These individuals were now held accountable not only

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<sup>17</sup>In one such unit, a number of soldiers began their interviews by saying, "I'm not stupid!," reflecting how they had been treated by the new commander.

<sup>18</sup>For example, many NCO's in one command had a habit of complaining about how "hosed up" things were, and how "nobody cared." The commander pointed out the destructiveness of this habit and set a new standard: "If you're going to say something negative about a problem, you need to say something positive about how to fix it." This standard was enforced and became a part of the unit's culture.

for their own behavior, but also for the behavior of squad leaders under their authority. Effective turnaround commanders made it a point to give positive recognition for achieving standards. However, patterns of repeated deviations from standards resulted in very direct (but polite) questions about commitment: "Do you really want to be here?" The unacceptability of repeated deviations was also explained clearly: "This is where we're at; this is where we want to get; and here is my plan for getting there. If you can't make a commitment to this, you don't have a future here."<sup>19</sup> Successful turnaround commanders commonly reported having to reshuffle and replace at least a few key personnel--officers, senior NCO's and occasionally full-time staff.<sup>20</sup>

### Stage 3: The Payoff.

Stages 1 and 2 were remedial and resulted in getting the unit up to standards. Stage 3 was the payoff. Units at this stage were able to conduct advanced and challenging training that was exciting for soldiers. There was time for officers and senior NCO's to praise and reward soldiers. Commanders and other unit members told us proudly that soldiers in the unit now did their own recruiting. The unit established a very positive reputation in the local Army Reserve community, and many soldiers now requested to transfer in from other units. It was especially gratifying for unit commanders that many good soldiers who had previously transferred out of these units because of low standards now wanted to rejoin them.

During this stage, the unit's high standards became internalized by soldiers at all levels, and became part of the unit's culture. When deployed, one commander pointed out, this meant that the unit would be able to carry out its mission and maintain high standards even if key leaders were lost.

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<sup>19</sup>For more on effective commanders' approach to counseling, see section VII.C.4 on 'tough love.'

<sup>20</sup>Some commanders were also very proactive in dealing with recruiters, to make sure that people could not automatically transfer into the unit from other units or from the Individual Ready Reserve. The objective here was to make sure that undesirable reservists with low standards could not get into the unit. As one first sergeant remarked, "You can't kill a reservist." Poor performers can continue to circulate between units, wasting the unit's time and adding to its attrition numbers. Thus, some commanders ensured that they were able to interview and reject these applicants before they showed up on their rolls.

### C. Leadership to Build Cohesiveness<sup>21</sup>

As noted above, cohesiveness is the strength of the force that holds a group together--the bonds between group members. We found that commanders viewed cohesiveness as very important, but that, with some exceptions, they did not give a great deal of thought to building cohesiveness per se. This seemed to be because they saw cohesiveness as largely a byproduct of other unit conditions they strove to create--quality training, high standards (especially reducing RST's), and confidence/respect for the leader. Cohesiveness is produced by rewarding or challenging events shared by a group over time. Reducing RST's increased attendance, producing more shared group experiences. Quality training made those shared experiences positive. (Soldiers especially commented on successful AT's and deployments as contributing to cohesiveness.) Confidence and respect in the leader also helped solidify the group (see section VII). Commanders also stated frequently that cohesiveness was more important at lower levels of the unit--squads and platoons. It was in these primary work groups that the strongest bonds were formed between soldiers. Nevertheless, effective commanders did take some actions focused squarely on building cohesiveness in their companies.

#### 1. Creating Enjoyable Company-Level Activities.

Effective commanders frequently mentioned the importance of conducting PT as an entire unit. Staging competitions between platoons was a way of creating drama and excitement during PT.<sup>22</sup> Competitions (with meaningful awards) were also staged on other mission-related areas, such as vehicle maintenance. Unit parties or Coke busts were sponsored at the end of a long day on field exercises or at AT. One commander staged a highly successful, voluntary "dining-in" shortly after AT at which the company celebrated its AT successes and its traditions. Other commanders sponsored community involvement activities, such as blood drives, which generated shared pride among unit members. Family activities were also important sources of cohesion, but will be discussed in more detail in

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<sup>21</sup>We found a number of very cohesive units that commanders acknowledged they could not take credit for. These units had been cohesive for as long as anyone in the unit could remember, and had developed a culture of care and support for each other. These units were commonly described by unit members as being "like a family," and new recruits were taken care of and welcomed by older members. This cohesiveness was viewed as an important resource by new commanders, who then focussed on training quality and standards.

<sup>22</sup>One commander pointed out the usefulness of combining pairs of platoons into two larger teams. This built bonds between platoons, and also allowed the commander to "balance" the abilities of the teams--by pairing the strongest with the weakest platoon.



section VIII.

2. Introducing New Members to the Unit.

Effective commanders placed special emphasis on the treatment of new members--especially non-prior service members, where attrition tends to be highest. They made sure that new members felt welcome and comfortable, and that they were integrated into the unit's activities. They sponsored active newcomer orientations, where new recruits were briefed by all leaders. The commander also made sure to meet with new recruits privately and to ensure that they felt welcome. Some commanders gave their home phone numbers to new recruits. They made sure sponsorship programs were working effectively. One commander noticed that new recruits were often intimidated by the E-5's who had been serving as sponsors, and made sure that recruits were shown around the unit by E-2's or E-3's, with whom they could talk more freely. New recruits were impressed with the skills that these junior enlisteds had learned in a short time--raising their own expectations.

In a number of units, we noticed special problems with new recruits in split option programs--young recruits who had signed up before high school graduation, and who therefore had to wait up to one year for their basic training. They commonly felt uncomfortable in the unit, since they did not have uniforms, did not know such basics as saluting and how to stand in formation, were often excluded from training, and wasted a lot of time "riding the couch" waiting for a menial assignment. Effective commanders made sure that they were integrated into command activities, finding a basic set of uniforms for them and making sure that they were trained in basic soldiering skills. Volunteer NCO's were found to train these recruits, who, because of this early training, often received honors during basic training. These honors were then celebrated when they returned to the unit after basic training, and were a source of pride for these young soldiers, for the NCO who had trained them, and for the unit as a whole.

## VII. BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND RESPECT IN THE LEADER<sup>23</sup>

While the section above involved standards that commanders required of soldiers, this section involves standards that soldiers required commanders to meet. There was an obvious reciprocity here: soldiers' willingness to meet their commanders' standards depended on commanders meeting the soldiers' standards. The ultimate in confidence and respect was one prior-service sergeant's statement that he "would follow [his commander] into Hell." We found that confidence and respect depended upon expertise, fairness, and the leaders' values.

### A. Demonstrating Expertise

Over time, commanders' expertise was apparent to soldiers from the quality of their decisions and the overall state of the unit. However, effective commanders paid attention to soldiers' early judgments of their expertise or credibility. This was especially important for commanders who were trying to raise their units' standards, and were therefore challenged more by subordinates. Demonstrating expertise was generally easier for commanders who had extensive Active Army experience, who were trained in the same specialty as their new unit (M.P., Engineering, etc.), and who had served well in the same unit earlier.

Effective commanders emphasized the importance of interviewing unit members and observing unit operations before making initial decisions--to avoid making bad decisions from which it would be hard to recover. Commanders moving to units with a new technical specialty also reported the necessity of identifying their expertise when it was questioned, as well as placing an early emphasis on those things they knew well, such as common task training. One commander explained to his senior NCO's how his prior experience as a tank commander would be relevant to their transportation unit. Other commanders mentioned the importance of acting confident: "How can I expect them to support a decision, if I don't seem to believe in it myself?"

However, effective commanders also made sure that they developed real expertise in their new technical specialty as quickly as possible. This included advanced courses, mastering field manuals, and having NCO's conduct training sessions for the commander and other officers. These "train the officers" sessions were often a source of pride for the NCO's who performed them.

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<sup>23</sup>Based upon the literature review in the previous report (Thomas, 1995), we initially began asking questions about soldiers' "trust" in the commander. It quickly became apparent that the term "confidence and respect" was more meaningful to US Army Reserve soldiers.

## B. Being Fair

This topic was extremely important to soldiers, and was a primary source of anger and disrespect for less-effective leaders. In our interviews, commanders tended to talk about fairness issues in terms of "leading by example." Their subordinates spoke passionately about the same issues in terms of "double standards" or "acting like they're better than we are." In some units with less effective leadership, we heard the same stories about the commander's double standards from many different people. It was clear that such stories were widely shared among soldiers in the unit, and had powerful effects on soldiers' confidence and respect in the commander.

Effective leaders went to great lengths to avoid the sort of cronyism that was prevalent in "good old boy" units. Two of the most effective leaders in our study had relatives in their units--a brother and a niece. Both announced this fact to their units in formation and stated that they would be even harder on those individuals to make sure they avoided playing favorites.

Effective leaders also made sure that they were not seen as enjoying special privileges. They led by example in physical training and in weight control. It was apparent to soldiers in the command that they put in an extraordinary amount of time and effort on behalf of the command--more, in fact, than they asked of others. They also tried to share the discomforts of field exercises and annual training equally with their soldiers. Thus, unlike commanders of some other units, they did not shower when their soldiers could not, and their billeting (and those of the officers as a group) were equivalent to those of the enlisted. These shared conditions, besides being fair, were a source of cohesiveness in the unit. One M.P. commander rolled up his sleeves and performed maintenance on his Humvee on most occasions--a fact proudly told to us by several people in the unit.

## C. Leadership Values

Issues of the commander's "leadership style" came up repeatedly in our interviews. By this, soldiers generally meant the way that the commander approached and treated them. In this section, we have tried to phrase our learnings in terms of the leadership values that underlie different leadership styles. By leadership values, we mean the things that commanders emphasized and paid most attention to in their interactions with subordinates.

We found that much of the complexity of leadership could be reduced to three sets of values related to mission, standards/accountability, and soldier care. Figure 3 shows the "leadership space" defined by these three values. All three seemed to be necessary for soldiers' confidence and respect in the commander. Effective leaders were systematically oriented in the direction shown by the heavy arrow in the figure--that is, they found ways of

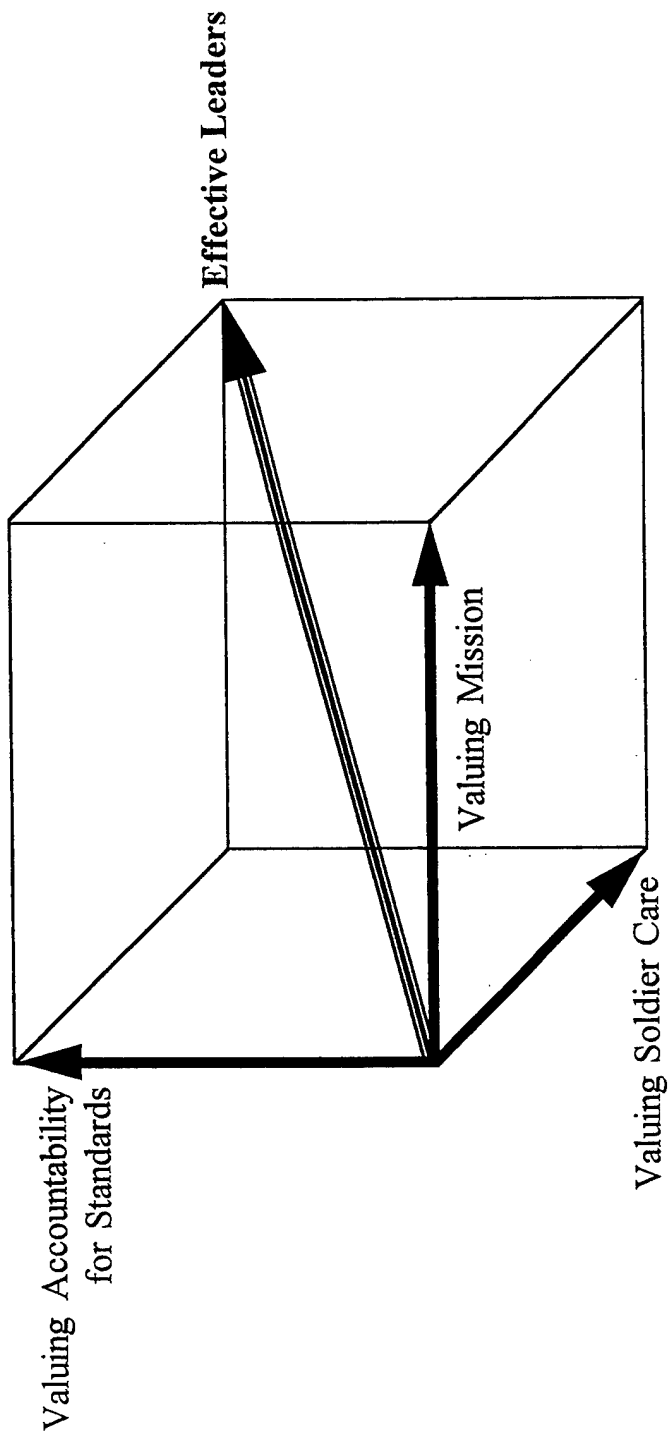


Figure 3. Effective Leadership Values: Orienting in Three-Dimensional Leadership Space

attending to all three values. One gifted commander, for example, repeatedly stated that his job was to prepare the unit for "completion of the mission without casualties and to standards", integrating all three values into a simple statement known by all soldiers in his command. In contrast, commanders who were clearly struggling seemed to be systematically neglecting at least one of the values.

Although translated into Army terms, these values are related to themes in the academic literature on leadership.<sup>24</sup> They are also consistent with General Colin Powell's (1995, p. 185) conclusion that successful military leadership requires a "vision" (for mission), a "whip hand" (for standards and accountability), and a "chaplain" (for soldier care).

1. Valuing the Mission.

Effective leaders were committed to the unit's mission and emphasized it as the fundamental purpose for being there. Their own commitment was apparent in the time and effort that they put into the unit (as discussed earlier). However, they also made that purpose real and compelling for their soldiers: "Remember why you're here--to get ready to go to war." The reality of deployment was emphasized to new recruits. Exercises were related to possible deployments: "If we were in Bosnia, we would be . . ." Training was clearly aimed at preparing the unit to be able to handle that mission with confidence. Effective commanders developed a clear picture (vision) for their soldiers of what readiness would look like for the unit--in terms of being able to competently handle the mission. The commanders' decisions were made and explained in terms of their impact on achieving this vision.

In contrast, soldiers saw other commanders as only paying lip service to the mission and being more interested in their own careers. They had little respect for such commanders. "If he cared, he would do a better job." "He is self-centered, arrogant, and a one-man-show. He's just using this unit as a stepping stone." "He's just here for himself--to get his ticket punched."

We noticed that the commander's sincere emphasis on mission transformed the dynamics between commander and subordinates in important ways. The mission and vision provided a "pull" for soldiers and united them with the commander as allies and teammates. The mission also provided a criterion for making decisions. There was less

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<sup>24</sup>See the discussion of leadership in Thomas (1995), and the exhaustive literature review in Bass (1990). Accountability and soldier care are similar to the "task" and "people" dimensions of traditional leadership research, while mission is similar to the "vision" element of inspirational or transformational leadership theory introduced in the 1980's.

talk about power and ego. "This is not about me and you; this is about the mission." Commanders were more open to learning, genuinely welcoming better ideas. It also became important to give people honest feedback on their behavior, since the mission was at stake. One soldier proudly told us that his commander was "pro-truth."

## 2. Valuing Standards and Accountability.

Whereas mission is about the unit's purpose, standards and accountability are about how it tries to achieve that purpose. A number of effective commanders spoke passionately about the importance of accountability--about people taking responsibility for their own actions, exercising self-discipline, caring about the quality of their efforts, "doing things right," and not taking the easy way out or merely trying to look good. For these commanders, then, accountability was about setting and living up to high standards of conduct and having personal integrity. Some of these commanders found great personal meaning in helping the young soldiers in their units develop the kinds of character that would help them throughout their lives. Some emphasized that the popular culture of the country had neglected accountability in recent decades, but that the country depended on the military for this basic value.

We have already described (in Section VI B) how effective commanders set and enforced high standards for their units. Leading by example, they also set high standards for their own conduct. For example, they did not cut corners on procedures and were genuinely concerned with quality. "I would rather do three things well than five things poorly" was a common view. They honored their commitments to soldiers and welcomed constructive feedback on their performance. One commander regularly requested feedback from his first sergeant, unit administrator, and others whose opinion he respected.

As noted earlier, the commander's emphasis on standards and accountability were especially important to soldiers with extensive active Army experience, and to new recruits who had just been socialized into these values in basic training.<sup>25</sup> For these soldiers, standards and accountability were closely linked to a sense of honor and self-esteem. When commanders were successful in raising unit standards and achieving a sense of accountability, it seemed to transform relations between commanders and their subordinates by creating a shared sense of honor and of mutual respect.

Effective commanders seemed to be especially aware of the importance of soldiers' sense of honor. It was clear to them that soldiers who were committed to the unit's mission and who demonstrated high standards and accountability were people of honor

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<sup>25</sup>One first sergeant who had just transitioned from active duty to a Reserve unit told us that he had vomited at the end of the first drill day because of the low standards in his new unit.

and deserved to be treated with respect. One commander stated with great passion, "It is a privilege to lead these men!" and spoke at length about what unit commanders owed to such troops. These commanders praised their soldiers' quality to other commanders. They also honored their soldiers by keeping them informed and by listening to their views. Commanders also treated soldiers with dignity by taking care not to embarrass them. For example, these commanders would not override or second-guess their first sergeant's decisions in public unless an immediate safety issue was involved. One commander reported that he would take the sergeant aside to say, "This is not your best decision, but we'll do it this time. Next time, let's do it a different way." Another would wait until his evening meeting with the first sergeant to discuss the matter.

### 3. Valuing Soldier Care.

Virtually all of the effective commanders in our sample commented at length on the importance of soldier care. The following quotes are illustrative. "If you care about them--genuinely--they will care back." "The most important factor is knowing people care about what happens to them." "95% of this job is keeping soldiers happy."

Soldier care was important for a number of reasons. At one level, the unit's soldiers were important assets that needed to be protected and brought home intact. Taking care of soldier problems also removed distractions that interfered with their performance. At a deeper level, however, the more important reason for soldier care was to demonstrate to soldiers that the commander genuinely cared about them as individual human beings. This caring appeared to transform the relationship between commander and subordinates by creating strong bonds of personal affection and loyalty. Commanders and soldiers used family metaphors to describe these bonds--the commander was "like a father," and the unit was "like a family." In short, the unit became a psychologically important group where soldiers felt that they belonged and were cared for. (In this way, the leader's values also made an important contribution to group cohesiveness.)

Effective commanders in our sample, then, spent considerable time and effort learning about individual soldiers and their concerns: "If you don't know that soldier, then you can't lead him." These commanders set aside office hours for this purpose and asked soldiers about their lives while touring workspaces. Commanders who were former enlisteds seemed to have a significant advantage in understanding soldier's needs and forming a personal bond. One commander made it a point to be able to call each soldier by name without looking at his/her nametag. Some commanders sent out Christmas and birthday cards to their soldiers.

Of course, asking about soldiers' lives and problems wasn't enough: effective commanders made a point of finding help. "You have to be aware that people have crises at home. You're the father, mother and therapist." "Some of them are young kids,

struggling financially." With the help of the first sergeant and others, commanders helped soldiers find financial counseling, provided advice on various matters, and helped them get jobs. Commanders and first sergeants told us of many cases in which they had counseled soldiers to enter the active Army in order to escape dangerous neighborhoods and abusive home situations, or to get enough income to survive--even though it created a personnel shortage for the unit. They also found other, less dramatic ways of showing concern for soldiers--avoiding unnecessary physical dangers, providing quality food and well-maintained buildings, not keeping soldiers late, and avoiding scheduling training on dates that were important to soldiers (like college graduation weekends, holidays, or the Daytona 500). Family outings (see below) were also a time to take care of soldiers. One commander also emphasized the importance of mercy and compassion in the case of minor, isolated infractions by good soldiers: "What do I gain from giving a soldier a U for being five minutes late?"

4. An Important Example: Tough Love.

An especially challenging task for commanders was dealing with subordinates who were failing to meet expectations. This challenge seemed to be a key test of leadership values and illustrated the importance of attending to all three values.

One effective commander observed that commanders' thinking often became polarized when they faced this challenge. That is, they tended to feel that they must be either "tough" to uphold standards or "soft" to demonstrate their care for the soldiers involved. This kind of thinking appeared to be a significant leadership trap for commanders. Some opted for being soft, which resulted in the sacrifice of standards and accountability, as seen in "good old boy" units. Others opted for being tough, at the neglect of soldier care. This kind of toughness involved the use of frequent punishment and threats to attempt to force compliance with standards--showing anger, criticizing, namecalling (cry babies, irresponsible, lazy), being quick to process soldiers out of the unit, or even having the entire unit "drop for pushups."

Effective leaders in our sample repeatedly warned us against the sort of punishment handed out by "tough" commanders. One said simply, "Discipline and disciplining [punishment] are incompatible." Another said, "I do not punish, yell, or threaten." Interviews with enlisteds showed that commanders who punished soldiers were often disrespected. One commander who, in his words, "got angry when people who should know better did things they shouldn't," was described by his troops as the kind of commander who would "get fragged by his own soldiers" in combat. It was apparent that this sort of punishment did not demonstrate soldier care and seemed to degrade soldiers' sense of honor and accountability. Several dedicated soldiers reported their strong sense of hurt and outrage over incidents in which they had been demeaned by their commanders in this way.

The effective commander mentioned above stated that being tough or



soft was a false dichotomy. Another approach, which he called "tough love," integrated all three of the leadership values. He personally conducted "respect" classes for all his leaders on this approach. When using this approach, the commander first made sure that soldiers understood how the behavior in question detracted from the mission, and that the commander could not allow it to continue. If the problem was severe or persistent enough, the commander made the potential consequences very clear: if the soldiers could not change their behavior, there would be no place for them in the unit. This consequence was presented less as a threat than as a warning about what would have to happen. The commander also emphasized soldiers' accountability for their own behavior and for meeting unit standards. Here, soldiers were treated with dignity--as honorable adults who made their own decisions, rather than as children that had to be forced to behave in certain ways. It was understood that not everyone belonged in the Army Reserve and that there would be no disgrace in leaving. If the commander felt angry, he regained his temper (often in his office) before talking with the soldiers. Finally, the commander also showed care for these soldiers in various ways. The commander made it clear that he wanted to keep the soldiers in the unit if it was possible, and that he was willing to work with them to change their behavior if the soldiers were sincere. The commander also showed care by listening, and by making sure that soldiers understood the consequences of their behavior, trying to make sure that they were acting in their own best interests.

It was apparent from interviews with soldiers that this tough love approach worked. Commanders who used this approach in our sample were respected, maintained high standards, and clearly seemed to be more effective than commanders who frequently punished soldiers. However, we were disturbed to learn that several of these tough love commanders had been criticized at least once by battalion commanders who confused their leadership style with being soft. For that reason, we were concerned that many of these battalion commanders were caught in the same leadership trap outlined above--equating good leadership with a readiness to punish. It was apparent that a number of superiors had provided leadership evaluations (and mentoring) that was at odds with our perceptions of what was happening in these units.

## VIII. BUILDING SPOUSE AND EMPLOYER SUPPORT

As noted earlier, commanders seemed to regard this factor as important, but not as critical as training quality, standards, and confidence and respect. Some of our effective commanders--especially those in turnaround situations--did not give great attention to these issues until the other conditions were noticeably improving. Others found more time for this factor from the beginning.

### A. Building Support from Spouses

Virtually all units had some family events and also had a Family Care program on paper. However, commanders differed in the time and creativity they put into managing them, with some seeming to merely go through the motions. Soldiers reported that effective efforts in this area were very much appreciated. These efforts were also interpreted as soldier care, and were frequently cited by soldiers as contributions to unit cohesiveness.

Family day activities varied between units. Almost all units had a Christmas event of some kind. Some units also had dinner-dances. Open houses worked well for units with particularly impressive equipment. Other units planned picnics/barbecues at nearby facilities. Off-site activities required more extensive planning to be effective, but seemed in general to be more satisfying. Soldiers complained that such events were "thrown together at the last minute" in some units. Soldiers in other units reported that it was important for authority for these events to be delegated to a senior NCO well in advance, that this NCO solicit other soldiers' ideas, and that the commander monitor the planning and give recognition and support for the project.<sup>26</sup>

Soldiers also had much to say about the commander's participation in these events. It was apparent that some commanders were not using these events to build support from spouses, and thus defeated their intended purpose. In one unit, we heard repeated complaints about the commander missing one of these activities to go skiing. In another unit, we heard complaints about the commander attending only briefly and socializing with other officers, neglecting enlisteds and their families. We also heard reports of commanders who, when they did mingle, appeared ungracious to soldiers' family members, so that spouses left early to escape the tension. In contrast, we heard favorable stories of other commanders who supported these events and played the gracious host to family members. One commander bought his own Santa Claus suit and handed out presents to children. Others made it a point

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<sup>26</sup>In one unit, with a number of poor soldiers, the commander and his first sergeant personally paid for much of the cost of a hotel dinner-dance for the unit, with soldiers paying only for the cost of their meals. All senior NCO's proudly told us this story.

to talk with all spouses during the course of an event, expressing appreciation for their sacrifices. Some handed out certificates of appreciation.

Family Support Programs, similarly, were more active in some units than others. Some commanders helped by sending a company newsletter home to families, meeting with Family Support Groups, allowing these groups to conduct bake sales in the drill hall to help raise money, and buying these baked goods to show support.

#### B. Building Support from Employers

Some commanders provided little help to soldiers in dealing with their employers, regarding this as the soldiers' responsibility and simply holding soldiers accountable for attending drills despite employers' demands. However, we found a number of things commanders could do to help build support from employers. It seemed to help to provide the annual training schedule to employers well in advance. In addition, some of our most effective leaders called employers themselves when their soldiers experienced problems, which these soldiers very much appreciated. They explained the role of the unit, the importance of the soldier attending drills, helped work out solutions with the employer, and expressed appreciation for the employers' cooperation. Here, the commander had more clout with employers than many young soldiers had, as well as having the authority to make decisions about acceptable solutions. Commanders reported the usefulness of sending follow-up letters to employers after these conversations--to again express their appreciation and to document the agreement they had reached. Over time, these contacts served to build personal relationships between the commander and employers, making future cooperation easier.

Some effective commanders used additional devices to gain the cooperation of employers. Some commanders sent certificates of appreciation to all employers. (In some units, employers had to be nominated by soldiers for these awards.) Employers were also invited to some unit events, including dining-ins and open houses, where they were recognized and honored for their support of the unit.

## IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations listed below are those that we heard repeatedly during interviews or that flow directly from our findings. They are not presumed to be comprehensive. Likewise, because our data only involved company-level interviews, they are not informed by detailed knowledge of conditions at higher levels of command. For those reasons, we recommend the use of focus groups of commanders at different levels to supplement these recommendations and to develop concrete methods of implementing them.<sup>27</sup>

### A. Building Leadership Knowledge and Skills

These recommendations are aimed at providing new or prospective commanders with knowledge and skill practice to be effective leaders.

1. Provide Leadership Training. There is a need for commanders to obtain information on effective leadership.
  - a. Brief current FSP commanders on our results.
  - b. Develop a pamphlet on leadership in FSP units that incorporates these results.
  - c. Incorporate training materials on this content into courses for new and prospective company commanders. Commanders noted that the existing course for new commanders is focused largely on administrative matters. Suggest adding material on leadership, together with role-play and other exercises designed to practice leadership skills.
  
2. Provide Leadership Mentoring. There is a need for commanders to receive mentoring or coaching from effective leaders. Commanders reported that USAR commanders receive less mentoring than their active Army counterparts, because of time limitations and distance.
  - a. Build a capacity for leadership mentoring into the new readiness teams being stood up by USARC.
  - b. Find ways of pairing Reserve commanders with their counterparts in the Active Army.

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<sup>27</sup>As of this writing, the USARC is planning a series of workshops of FSP commanders and first sergeants to generate action recommendations from this report. We also suggest using focus groups of battalion and higher commanders to generate action recommendations from their vantage points.

3. Provide Leadership Feedback. There is a need for commanders to obtain regular feedback on aspects of their leadership.
  - a. Develop measures of leadership and unit conditions that assess the material discussed in this report. These measures will include ratings by unit members.
  - b. Collect this information and provide feedback to commanders on a regular basis.
  
4. Provide Junior Officers with More Leadership Experience. Several commanders commented on the need for non-prior service officers to spend additional time as platoon leaders, or in battalion positions, before assuming command of a company. Exceptions can be made for high-performers.
  - a. Extend platoon leader tours for non-prior service officers, and/or
  - b. Rotate non-prior service platoon leaders into battalion staff positions before assuming company-level command.

**B. Reward the Extra Effort Required of FSP Commanders.**

Our most effective leaders were not in the USAR for the money. However, these rewards would make their pay and benefits more equitable in view of their extra time and effort, would provide the extra recognition due them, and would make it easier for more leaders to justify a higher level of commitment.

1. Provide Greater Pay and Benefits to FSP Commanders. The Tiered Readiness/Tiered Resource Plan developed by the USAR would allow this change for FSP commanders as a group.
  - a. Provide FSP commanders with additional Unit Training Assembly (UTA) credits each month for the extra planning time required, beyond what non-FSP commanders receive. (Some additional credits should be made to other unit leaders as well).
  - b. Reimburse FSP commanders for extra travel to and from unit and/or other sites when not in a paid status. These expenses, such as for visiting a possible field site, are currently "out of hide."
  - c. Pay FSP commanders and subordinate leaders for an annual "offsite" planning weekend. Consider making this event at a local resort facility, as a well-deserved perk.

2. Provide Extra Rewards and Recognition for More Effective FSP Commanders. Among FSP commanders, there is a need to provide accurate recognition for those commanders whose extra commitment is producing results.
  - a. Use measurements of leadership and unit conditions as an important input for more accurate evaluation of commanders' effectiveness. We heard too many stories of politically astute commanders getting promoted despite mediocre performance, while effective commanders were counseled to stop being so "soft." Several committed commanders appeared to be doing an effective job despite the lack of appreciation of superiors. Recommend that the feedback measures in recommendation A3a, above, be incorporated into performance reviews.
  - b. Provide recognition and/or awards to commanders who exhibit exceptional effectiveness. Suggest this involve finding ways for these commanders' stories to be told to other commanders and junior officers.
  - c. Provide junior officers with a realistic preview of the time demands required of effective company commanders.

C. Provide Help for FSP Company Commanders.

Our results suggest several ways in which FSP commanders could be supported.<sup>28</sup>

1. Protect FSP Commanders from Unnecessary Uncertainties. There is a need to remove some of the intrusions that make it difficult for these commanders to plan their training and to stick to these plans.

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<sup>28</sup>Here, we are not including logistics and technical support, such as better drill halls, more motor pool room, and access to hands-on training. Our interviews show that this support is very important to quality training. However, particular needs appear to be highly specific to particular units and types of units. As of this writing, USARC Readiness Office staff have been working on these issues.

- a. Reduce the number of approvals required for field exercises. Delays caused by many levels of approvals were almost universal sources of complaint. Suggest empowering company commanders to make more of these decisions, and to much reduce the number of approvals for decisions that must be reviewed. Suggest the criterion for a required approval be "Does this add sufficient value for the company commander to offset the delay?"
- b. Reduce unnecessary taskings by higher commands. We heard near universal complaints about the sheer number of taskings added by different command levels. There is an apparent need for policies or other mechanisms to reduce these where possible. This is especially the case for last-minute taskings. Is it necessary for a line company that is co-located with its battalion headquarters to help fill in the battalion's change-of-command formations? Is it legitimate for that battalion commander or master sergeant to commandeer the company's soldiers for its own work details at the last minute?
- c. Provide information directly to the company via e-mail where possible. Important information was sometimes delayed by going through various layers of command--for example, a list of types of units eligible for reenlistment bonuses.

2. Provide Personnel Support.

- a. Reduce delays in outprocessing enlisted soldiers. Commanders often commented on the long delays here, leaving large numbers of "ghosts" on their roster that in turn prevented them from filling vacancies. These delays also made the unit attrition data we obtained from USARC an unreliable index of current conditions in the unit.
- b. Consider using more active Army NCO's as full-time staff in FSP units. Commanders who had such NCO's commented on their credibility with soldiers, their commitment and extreme value in helping to raise standards, and their mentoring of other staff, NCO's, and sometimes officers.
- c. Consider giving FSP commanders more control over accepting recruits. Some effective commanders negotiated such arrangements themselves with local recruiters. It was especially important to be able to review soldiers wishing to transfer into the unit from the Individual Ready Reserve--to avoid soldiers who had repeatedly dropped out of other units.

- d. Consider making retention NCO a formal reserve position. Retention NCO's (a collateral duty) seemed to provide important help in retaining new recruits, encouraging reenlistment, and in soldier care in general, but were forced to treat this task as a secondary responsibility.
- e. Consider providing additional pay/benefits to enlisted soldiers in FSP units. This is partly an equity issue, similar to the pay/benefit issue for commanders.

3. Help Commanders Be More Available to Unit Staff.

Communications and information-processing equipment could help here.

- a. Provide FSP unit commanders with cellular phones and/or pagers. This equipment would help many commanders be "on line" for full-time staff. Having the USAR pay for this equipment would also help defray costs now born by commanders and their civilian employers.
- b. Provide FSP unit commanders with laptop computers that are tied into unit data bases. With modems and proper software, this would allow the commander to handle e-mail with the unit, but also to be able to review and work on personnel records and other unit data from home or work.

D. Conduct Further Research.

Now that the leadership factors in this report have been identified, it is possible to perform follow-up research to answer other applied questions.

- a. Consider quantitative research on the factors in this report. The measures in recommendation A3a would enable such research. Results would yield hard data on the relative sensitivity of readiness and other unit outcomes to different unit conditions and leadership factors, identifying high priority targets for interventions. It would also enable USARC to track the effectiveness of different training and other interventions upon these factors.
- b. Consider research on stress management for FSP company commanders. Our results document the heavy workload on these commanders from their USAR job plus a civilian job. There is a need to understand how some effective commanders can handle these demands better than others. Some tools, including time management, may also prove helpful in helping these commanders.



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