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In an attempt to improve unit cohesion the US Army is in the process of introducing a regimental system for its combat arms units. Its introduction is concurrent with a plan to initiate unit rotation between CONUS and OCONUS which could generate a number of related problems. The author traces the background of the regimental system, anticipates problem areas which will probably be experienced by the US Army and offers some solutions for their resolution.

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From the opening of the Moro battle on December 5, until April 20, 1944, the Regiment was seldom out of close touch with the enemy, and never out of reach of the enemy guns. For five months it existed under the most adverse conditions of war. During this period there were more than four hundred battle casualties from a unit whose fighting strength was seldom much above six hundred. As for the Regiment, not only did it survive physically but the spirit too survived, outwardly undamaged and perhaps even strengthened by the long purgatory.

There was but one criterion for acceptance--that the stranger be a man. And if he was, then he was accepted without question, without reservation. Negroes, Jews, Indians, Ukrainians, Germans, even Italians, they came and they were taken in. They gave their loyalty and their love without stint, without limit. And so it was that though the human face of the Regiment was constantly changing, the spirit and the heart remained the same, for the newcomers gave what they themselves had received from the hands of those whom they replaced.

Farley Mowat,  
THE REGIMENT, 1955

#### THE UNITED STATES ARMY REGIMENTAL SYSTEM--A PANACEA?

##### INTRODUCTION

Anyone observing the senior leadership of the US Army from a perspective as close as my own would have to be impressed with their ability to diagnose a problem and subsequently to develop a thorough and detailed plan to rectify it. A serious problem worthy of their attention and difficulty to the extreme reared its ugly head during the recent war in Southeast Asia. Units lacking cohesion in peacetime are only unhappy, however, units lacking cohesion in combat suffer unwarranted casualties. As a rule, US commanders serving in Vietnam found it unnecessarily difficult to foster unit cohesion because of the negative impact of man for man rotation so

following their departure from Southeast Asia, the US Army set out to find the solution to this critical operational problem.

Not surprisingly, like most military problems, unit cohesion, or more accurately, the lack of it, had been analyzed by an earlier generation of US Army leadership. The Combat Arms Regimental System (CARS) study was the result and in 1957 it was approved by the Secretary of the Army. The study had two main organizational objectives:

The provision of a regimental structure similar to that found in the British and numerous Commonwealth Armies that would maintain the historical continuity of combat arms units and that would remain stable inspite of fluctuations in the overall strength and tactical structure of the Army; and

The establishment of a parent regimental headquarters at permanent continental United States (CONUS) locations and the assignment of various support functions to them.<sup>1</sup>

The first of these objectives was implemented in 1961. All Active Army, Army Reserve and National Guard combat units were redesignated as members of the regiments retained under the CARS. Studies conducted during the period 1959-60 concluded that the establishment of regimental headquarters was not feasible at the time, primarily because of budget and manpower restraints. Further, it was considered that the "home" regiment concept would lead to inflexibilities in the utilization of manpower, duplication of effort, and the misuse of personnel and facilities. As a result, what exists today might be described as the "form" of the desired regimental system without much of the "substance."<sup>2</sup>

In 1971 the Chief of Staff of the Army directed his Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER) to reexamine the feasibility of continuing the move to a true regimental system. A DCSPER study group eventually recommended that no further action be taken to implement the regimental

headquarters and that no attempt should be made to superimpose the regimental structure on any other existing Army organizations.<sup>3</sup>

Ten years later, as a result of the enthusiasm and leadership of General Edward C. Meyer, Chief of Staff of the Army, long-term plans were approved implementing a unit rotation system for units at battalion level and below and the introduction of a "United States Regimental System" (USRS).

#### AIM

The aim of this paper is to identify some potential problem areas associated with the introduction of the United States Regimental System and to offer some constructive suggestions for dealing with them.

#### THE REGIMENTAL SYSTEM

Before elaborating on the proposed US version of the regimental system it will probably be beneficial to very briefly review the origin of the system and its utilization throughout the annals of military history.

Contrary to popular opinion the system was not created by the British. Writing such as Homer's Illiad and Caesar's Commentari de bello Gallico clearly indicate that the regimental system was used by both ancient Greek and early Roman democracies. It unfortunately fell into decay with the emergence of dictatorships which relied upon mercenaries, professional soldiers and conscripts to provide military forces. The motivator was money and equality of citizenship rather than duty and honor.<sup>4</sup>

The British version of the regimental system has gradually evolved since its beginning at the time of the restoration of King Charles II, following the period of long parliamentary rule under Cromwell from 1645 to 1660. A standing army, containing a fixed number of regiments, was created



under Charles II, marking a departure in the manner in which the British Army had previously been organized and controlled. Prior to the establishment of a standing army, whenever the king wished to fight a war, he commissioned peers or other worthies as colonels to raise troops for this purpose. The colonel not only commanded his troops in battle, he also trained and equipped them within the financial limits set by the king--making whatever profits he could out of the transaction. The role of the colonel changed little following the creation of the standing army, he continued to be both commanding officer and proprietor of his regiment, and it was still regarded as normal and proper for him to make a living from the regiment. It was decided from the outset, however, that even though some colonels would undoubtedly rise to higher ranks, they would be permitted to retain their colonelcies. In fact, it soon became the exception rather than the rule for colonels of regiments to hold colonel's rank, and as the 18th century advanced there was an increasing tendency for colonelcies to be held by senior officers of advanced age who continued to draw their income from their regiments but who did not have the time to be near them, even if they had the inclination to do so. The day-to-day running of the regiments was left to the lieutenant colonels.

It soon became evident that this system gave the colonels excessive powers and also led to the gross misuse of public funds. A series of reforms took place that made the colonels of regiments entirely honorary. Today, colonels of regiments, who are retired officers of some distinction, are selected by their regiments and normally serve for tenure of five years. The "Colonel of the Regiment" is looked upon as the guardian of regimental traditions. He fosters esprit-de-corps and represents regimental interests, including alliances with the regiments of other countries. The domestic affairs of the regiment are very much his concern, including

charities, funds, properties, chapels, museums, regimental associations, and memorials. He also deals with all matters affecting the Colonel-in-Chief of the Regiment, usually a member of the British Royal Family who has consented to a lifetime appointment, and to whom the regiment nominally belongs.

It should be apparent that in the regimental system a regiment is not a tactical entity with a fixed organization. Rather, it is composed of one or more battalions of the same branch which share a common identity in the form of the regiment's name, history, and traditions. Battalions are found in the Active Army or the Army Reserve, or both, and the number of battalions can be changed to meet the exigencies of the Army as a whole. Though all of the same branch, the battalions may be organized and equipped to carry out different functions. For example, in an infantry regiment, one battalion might be mechanized, another might be airmobile, and another airborne. Whatever their particular role, they are organized and equipped in accordance with Army Tables of Organization and Equipment (TOE). They may be grouped in the same brigade or division but typically they are not, individual battalions being scattered throughout the Army wherever they are required. Regardless of name, each regiment usually considers one location to be its home stations where it establishes its regimental headquarters or depot. Regimental headquarters vary considerably in size, depending upon the functions they have been required to undertake, and the scales of manning and equipping that have been authorized for them. Typical functions might include the publication of regimental periodicals and histories, operation of a regimental museum, recruiting, and the basic training of recruits. Although battalion manning levels are a central or Department of the Army responsibility, within these levels the regimental headquarters maintains a close interest in the career progression of its members and makes recommendations for their employment outside the regiment. Normally, a regimental

headquarters will be given the authority to assign soldiers, NCOs and junior officers to particular appointments within the battalions. Membership is identifiable through distinct badges or insignia. These may be worn on a uniform that differs in no other respect from that worn by the Army at large, or which may differ in minor respects, such as in the wearing of distinctive headdress. The dress of some regiments may depart radically from the remainder of the Army, as in the case of Scottish regiments. Dress regulations are not, however, completely whimsical and they must be approved at Department of the Army level.

Personnel may be transferred from one battalion of the regiment to another should they wish to do so, or should circumstances so require. In addition, they can request to be transferred to a different regiment or to a different branch of the service. Generally, however, members choose to remain within, and to advance upwards through their own regimental structure. In order to give individuals a broad range of experience and to meet the Army's requirements for staffs at headquarters, training establishments or recruiting duties, members are detached from battalions for varying periods of time. On completion of such a period of detachment they return to troop duty with one of the battalions of the regiment and, frequently, to the particular battalion of origin. Such outside detachments or postings are called, "Extra-Regimental Employment" (ERE), and occur with greater frequency in the case of officers than that of NCOs and soldiers. It is not unusual, for example, to find soldiers or NCOs who have served in the same battalion for ten or more years. This does not mean that they will have been in the same geographical location for ten years. Their battalion may have moved to new locations, including overseas, and they will have moved with it.

Within the structure of the regiment the rank of lieutenant colonel is the highest that can be attained. Colonels and higher cannot expect further duty within the regiment as they will be assigned to higher command and staff functions. They, therefore, usually wear general staff as opposed to regimental insignia, except in the case of mess dress where they are permitted to continue wearing regimental patterns. Despite the fact that they can no longer serve within their regiment, these officers normally maintain their sentimental ties to it, and they may be called upon to serve as members of regimental promotion boards, or in honorary positions within the regimental hierarchy.<sup>5</sup>

A regiment can best be described as a family or tribal organization that a member joins for the duration of his service career and also into retirement via regimental associations if he so desires. It is a system not of symbols and slogans, though they play a certain part, but of deep human relationships based on artificial kinship.

What the regimental system is not is a manning system. It is designed to create cohesion within a unit in spite of the inevitable instability caused in some degree by every manning system. Over the years regiments have been manned by every conceivable procedure: subunit replacement; man for man rotation; coercion; volunteers; conscripts; and so on ad nauseam. The well led and organized regiments survived any and all manning systems and will continue to do so in the future. Like a strong family the only thing that can temporarily destroy it is total annihilation and even then its unborn will ultimately carry on the standards and tradition.

The value and cost of the regimental system cannot be quantified in peacetime. Efficiency experts will forever shudder at the perceived wastes inherent in the system: separate regimental messes (clubs); temporary duty costs for regimental promotion boards; unique badges and possibly uniforms;

time required for ceremonial activities, etc., etc. In battle, however, other factors being more or less equal, the outcome is a function of such intangibles as will, morale and spirit. The regimental system's sole reason for existence is to enhance these qualities both in the individual and his "family." How can one even estimate the value of the most important intangible in combat--success?

#### THE NEW MANNING SYSTEM

The US Army commenced the introduction of its "New Manning System" (NMS) in January of 1983. The primary aim of the NMS is to enhance unit cohesion by mandating stability within company subunits and ultimately battalion sized units for a period of three years. In the current stage of the system's introduction first timers will conduct initial entry training together as a company serial and following graduation will be assigned to their battalion as a company package ready to start a fifteen month stateside tour of duty. Eighteen months after its soldiers joined the Army (three months initial entry training and fifteen months stateside duty), the company will deploy overseas where the first timers will serve the remaining eighteen months of their initial enlistment.

Career soldiers will also be stabilized in the company for three years. A company's requirement for careerists will be assigned to the company eighteen months prior to overseas deployment. They will remain with the company for the eighteen month overseas tour of duty following which those who are accompanied will be reassigned within the theaters as their entire company is replaced by a follow-on company from the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Initially the system will be restricted to company sized groupings; however, if successful, the plan calls for the introduction of battalion

sized rotations once the company level trial is complete (possibly as early as 1986).

The NMS is closely linked to the concurrent introduction of the United States Regimental System. Ideally, under this system each regiment would consist of four mirror image battalions, two at a permanent CONUS home base and two OCONUS. While unit colours would not move between CONUS and OCONUS, initially company and ultimately battalion sized drafts of personnel on group orders would move in and out of CONUS based on the eighteen month rotation schedule discussed above. Once in their new location, companies would join, or in the case of battalion sized units, would become the unit whose colours reside permanently in that location.

The CONUS home basing aspect of the system is designed to appeal to career soldiers by enabling them to put down "roots"--purchase homes, establish community contacts, provide for spousal careers--all in the local community where their regiment is based. The eventual idea is to have all combat arms soldiers serve stateside troop assignments at the regimental home base.<sup>7</sup>

#### POTENTIAL PROBLEM AREAS ASSOCIATED WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF THE USRS

##### Association with NMS

Probably the greatest threat to the successful introduction of the USRS is its inherent association with the NMS and therefore its vulnerability if the NMS encounters serious problems. The introduction of a USRS is a significant step towards enhancing the cohesion within US units and it will take time to develop its own American character distinct from the British Commonwealth systems. If during this developmental period the NMS encounters serious difficulties there will undoubtedly be a tendency to lay some (perhaps most) of the blame at the door of the regimental system. This

action would be both unfair and unfortunate for a regimental system is not a manning system, it is a way of life.

While the USRS' development within the NMS should be encouraged it must be stressed that the USRS has to be strong enough to survive any manning system, even one dictating man for man replacement. If the regimental system is to be taken seriously by this and future generations of US soldiers it must not be treated as a passing whim of the Chief of Staff of the Army, but rather as a long-term commitment that must be supported no matter what manning policies emerge in the future.

#### Unit Affiliations

The long-term plan for the NMS calls for battalion sized rotation to replace company sized rotation as early as 1986. Under the current plan units will rotate without their CONUS UICs and colours and will therefore adopt the UICs and colours left behind by the OCONUS unit they replace.

Having worked so hard to establish unit cohesion during the first eighteen months of a unit's "life," it seems highly self-destructive to force that unit to change its battalion designation just: "to adroitly sidestep the management complexities involved in changing data systems, which would be necessary if colours moved with the troops."<sup>8</sup> At the eighteen month stage of "togetherness" the loyalty to the battalion will undoubtedly eclipse the loyalty to the regiment, just as platoon loyalty preempts company loyalty. The entire regimental system is based on fostering just this type of incremental loyalty and it should not be tampered with just to satisfy "management complexities." Units should rotate with their names and their colours.

### Three Year Unit Lifespan

Closely related to the unit affiliation problem is the critical aspect of the mandated three year unit lifespan. Any unit that has trained, played, suffered and perhaps even fought together as a team for three years will undoubtedly be a good, operationally capable unit. After three years, the loyalty to the unit would probably be intense and there would be a great deal of well earned pride associated with being "the best Battalion in the Regiment." At this stage of a unit's lifespan the NMS, in the interests of manning efficiency, would have it encounter a terminal disease and disband in order to make room for a new slate of personnel who would adopt the UIC and colours left behind by another unit just departing for OCONUS.

Lieutenant General Livsey, Commander 7th US Corps, espouses a training principle that says a unit's operational capability should not peak once a training year at the culmination of the collective training period because of the difficulty of convincing the Warsaw Pact to attack only during our periods of peak efficiency. The same principle can be applied to emphasize a potential problem with the three year unit life span. Under the NMS a unit will have a relatively short period of peak efficiency during its eighteen month OCONUS tour. It will take at last six months to settle in and become familiar with the procedures and up to four months to get ready for rotation to CONUS. That leaves approximately ten months for the unit to concentrate on its operational mission--followed by a six month gap before the unit replacing it is operationally effective.

In addition, the absolute creation and disbandment of a unit every three years will be a major traumatic for most unit personnel. Close relationships, respect, shared experiences, loyalties, trust and confidence will have been well developed during the unit building period only to have almost everyone go their separate way every three years. Such a system



would be in direct opposition to the aim of any regimental system practiced until now. The true regimental system permits a core of everchanging, experienced regimental personnel to carry the new members as they are integrated into the unit. This desire to perpetuate the unit's capabilities and reputation for one's own satisfaction and pride will not occur if units are disbanded every three years and a handful of experienced regimental personnel are forced to create a new unit (with new colours) from scratch.

If there is to be unit rotation within the NMS then a partial solution to the unit disbandment dilemma exists. On return to CONUS units could process their junior members requesting release at the end of their initial engagement. Officers and noncommissioned officers with extended service in the unit could be reassigned. (These numbers will probably be greater than currently anticipated by the NMS as OCONUS accompanied non-regimental positions will be rapidly plugged by accompanied regimental personnel looking for assignments after a unit's eighteen month tour.) Following these releases and reassignments the unit's personnel deficiencies would be filled by recent graduates from initial entry training and officers and noncommissioned officers from non-regimental duty. This system could be enhanced by ensuring that the majority of subunit seconds in command and commanders are not reassigned at the same time.

Such a modification would have the added benefit of persuading a number of personnel who would otherwise apply for their release to reenlist as they could remain with their unit "family" rather than face reassignment to a new unit. Unit loyalty is essential within a regimental system and must not be ignored in the interests of administrative efficiency.

### Social Requirements

In battle the most effective combat units are those in which the social pressures generated by their messes and institutional life are blended with the military authority of the chain of command to form the amalgam needed to master the situation of the moment. Each regiment needs its own officers' mess, senior noncommissioned officers' mess and junior rank club in order to promote and perpetuate its social traditions and to facilitate the education of its more junior members in the details of those traditions. This requirement cannot be achieved in the US Army's Club System unless significant modifications are made to the regulations and customs governing the operations of all clubs supporting regimental units.

Regimental messes are the social home of its members and as such must be showcases for the regiment's memorabilia. Ideally the mess managers should be regimental personnel executing a secondary duty and the executive committee should be led by regimental officers and noncommissioned officers as appropriate. The regimental commander/unit commanding officer and the regimental sergeant major must be the commanding officers of their respective messes even if outranked by other installation personnel who because of proximity might belong to the same mess (i.e., the divisional commander and his staff).

The value of the regimental mess system is difficult to quantify in peacetime and as a result will encounter a good deal of resistance from the efficiency watchdogs in the Pentagon and Congress. Nevertheless its introduction must be pursued as regimental messes are part of the key to the successful survival of the USRS.

A number of compromises are possible. If regiments cannot have their own messes then they must, as a minimum, have their own designated area

within a large club where non-regimental members may only visit on invitation. If there is insufficient space in the club for such an option then the entire club could be designated a regimental mess and while non-regimental personnel on the installation would be bona fide members of the mess the decor and traditions would be strictly regimental. Non-regimental personnel would serve on various mess committees but would not be eligible for the position of President of the Mess Committee. This latter option works quite well on some installations within the Canadian Forces.

It should be noted that no army to date has ever successfully organized a regimental system without including as an essential prerequisite a regimental mess system. A club under the current US system will not be capable of providing the social environment essential to the development of a regiment's customs and traditions. The problem should be addressed as a priority matter.

#### Home basing

Current plans call for stateside regimental home bases. Units returning from OCONUS duty would always return to the same geographical location in the US. According to Army magazine,

The home basing aspect of the system should appeal particularly to career soldiers because it will enable them to put down 'roots'--buy homes, establish friendships--in the local communities where their regiment is based.

In the interests of stability such an idea certainly has merit. Unfortunately while attempting to solve one problem it could well create another, more serious handicap to unit efficiency. Neither the United Kingdom or Canada necessarily return their combat arms units to the same installation following an overseas tour of duty. There are regimental home stations

(bases in US parlance) however such locations may only house the tiny non-tactical regimental headquarters and in some cases the regimental depots where new recruits are given their basic training. Units themselves are rotated through a number of possible locations depending on the requirements of the service. By having units of the same regiment in different locations it is possible to employ personnel within the same regiment while resisting the temptation to let them establish geographical "roots."

Once an individual has remained in the same stateside location for an extended period i.e., seven or eight years, he will be less agreeable to an assignment away from the regimental area. Any number of factors will influence his decision to resist such an assignment: a partially paid mortgage; a spouse's career; children's education; after hours second job, etc. Even the frequent OCONUS assignments will not preclude this potential inflexibility providing the unit always returns to the same US home base.

The solution to this dilemma is relatively simple and easier to manage than the proposed scheme. Do not try and colocate all the units of the same regiment on the same installation. This action would permit individuals to stay within their regiment and in some cases, especially following OCONUS tours, the same unit, without establishing "roots" to the detriment of unit efficiency.

#### Career Progression

The final observation involves the critical and sensitive area of regimental career progression. Because the regiment is a tightly knit family, members of the family must have a say in who progresses to greater responsibility within the family. This is not to say that the system has to be incestuous. Any number of checks and balances can be worked into the

system to ensure abuses are kept to the minimum. It is absolutely essential however that all personnel within the regiment understand that their regimental superiors are intimately responsible for their careers even when they are employed on duties outside of regimental units.

This objective could be achieved with modifications to the current US promotion and assignment policy. It would necessitate the creation of regimental promotion boards who would determine the sequence of promotion of their personnel to fill quotas provided by MILPERCEN. In addition the regiments could be made responsible for recommending assignments to key positions.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The creation and introduction of a United States Army Regimental System is an ambitious and highly desirable objective which should be pursued with determination and tenacity. It will be all too tempting to forget the overall objective as problems are encountered along the way however the final product will undoubtedly be worth the pain and the wait. In the past numerous armies, including my own, have said the US Army is too large to introduce the regimental system. I no longer believe that theory providing the current plan is pursued with the degree of flexibility required in any large scale experiment involving people. What must be avoided is the tendency to capitulate to the critics spouting the inevitable platitudes about measured performance and cost effectiveness. The well proven value of the regimental system cannot be quantified in peacetime and therefore its introduction and acceptance must be an act of professional military faith. If unit effectiveness is improved in war and unit pride and efficiency enhanced in peacetime then surely the inevitable trauma of the transition period will have been worth it. This must not turn out to be a short-term

experiment but rather a long-term commitment to professional excellence. I for one join the community of regimental soldiers around the world who wish the United States Army every success with this worthy undertaking.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Lieutenant Colonel P. W. Faith, Lieutenant Colonel D. I. Ross, "Application of the Regimental System to the United States Army." TRADOC Study, April 1980, p. 1.
2. Ibid., p. 1.
3. Ibid., p. 7.
4. Brigadier General D. G. Loomis MC, OMM, CD, "The Regimental System." Mobile Command Letter, January 1975, p. 5.
5. Faith, Ross, p. 10.
6. Colonel B. I. Legge, Lieutenant Colonel M. A. Andrews, "Unit Comes First in New Manning System," Army Green Book 1982-83, October, 1982, p. 206.
7. L. J. Binder, "New Manning System Arms at Stability," Army, February, 1983, p. 23.
8. Ibid., p. 23.