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STUDENT REPORT

GETTING A GRIP ON CAREERISM

MAJOR MICHAEL L. MOSIER 88-1915

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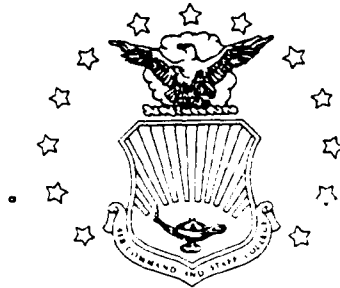
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GETTING A GRIP ON CAREERISM

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requirements for graduation.

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This article examines the complexities of treating careerism. The background of careerism is examined, as well as current definitions. The difficulties in applying the definition of careerism are discussed. Finally, thoughts on the treatment of careerism in the officer corps are presented. The article concludes that despite the many factors which make careerism difficult to pinpoint, three steps will help the officer corps get a grip on careerism. First, the officer corps must develop a common understanding of what careerism is, as well as what it isn't. Second, strong, ethical leadership is needed to channel healthy competition and ambition. Finally, the personnel system should be reviewed for policies which foster a careerist orientation.						
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PREFACE

This article was written to explore one of the greatest challenges facing the officer corps today: careerism. As the Air Force prepares to mount a major effort to reverse this disturbing trend, it is imperative the officer corps understand careerism in all its complexities. If careerism is treated in an immoderate manner, reforms may be not only ineffective, but counterproductive. The purpose of this article is to explore the complexities of careerism; highlight the need for a cautious, judicious approach; and recommend measures to deal with careerism.

Subject to approval, this manuscript will be submitted to Air Power Journal for consideration.

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Major Michael L. Mosier is a 1973 graduate of the USAF Academy, and attended pilot training at Reese AFB, Texas. Following pilot training, Major Mosier flew the B-52 as a copilot at Beale AFB, California, and an aircraft commander at Carswell AFB, Texas. In 1980, he served as a T-37 instructor pilot at Laughlin AFB, Texas, and later as a staff officer and T-37 flight examiner at HQ ATC, Randolph AFB, Texas. In 1984, Major Mosier attended the Defense Intelligence College, the US Department of State's Foreign Service Institute, and West Germany's Federal Language Institute in preparation for his assignment as the Assistant Air Attache to the Federal Republic of Germany. He left the American Embassy in 1987, and is currently attending the Air Command and Staff College.

Major Mosier holds a Master's Degree in Personnel Management from Webster University. He is a distinguished graduate of Squadron Officer School, and a graduate of the Air War College Correspondence Program.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Preface.....	iii
About the Author.....	iv
Executive Summary.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
From Occupationalism to Careerism.....	2
Careerism Defined.....	3
Difficulties in Pinpointing Careerism.....	4
Difficulties in Treating Careerism.....	6
Getting a Grip on Careerism.....	9
Conclusion.....	11
Bibliography.....	13



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REPORT NUMBER

88-1915

AUTHOR(S)

Major Michael L. Mosier

TITLE

Getting a Grip on Careerism

I. Purpose: To examine the complexities of treating careerism, and to propose methods of eliminating careerism within the officer corps.

II. Problem: In this age of military reform, careerism has become a focus of attention by sociologists and members of the officer corps alike. The Air Force has recognized the danger of this self-serving, promotion-oriented behavior, and is mounting a major effort to make fundamental changes on the individual, as well as institutional, level. However, because careerism is such a complex, amorphous subject, an overly-zealous, simplistic approach could have very different effects than those intended.

III. Data: Studies by prominent military sociologists indicate basic values within the officer corps have shifted in recent years. Because officers increasingly view the military as an occupation, as opposed to a calling, self-interest has supplanted self-sacrifice as the predominant ethic. Critics have labeled occupationalist behavior careerism. Although there are several definitions, for purposes of this article careerism is defined as the practice of placing self-interest above the interests of the organization, for the purpose of personal advancement.

CONTINUED

IV. Conclusions: Although the definition is relatively straightforward, several factors make careerism difficult to deal with. First, few officers view careerism in exactly the same way. What may be careerism to one, may be acceptable behavior to another. Second, to accurately identify careerism, one must be able to determine what motivates an individual's behavior. Motivation is extremely difficult to assess, and misjudgment can lead to suspicion, distrust, and a breakdown in unit cohesion. Third, some aspects of the personnel system tend to foster a careerist orientation. Two examples are pilot retention and joint officer personnel policies. A fourth difficulty in dealing with careerism stems from the close relationship between careerism and self-interest. Although careerism detracts from achieving organizational objectives, self-interest can benefit the organization, as well as the individual. To eliminate self-interested actions is to discard a useful tool. Finally, the legitimate need within the military for competitive spirit and ambition make careerism difficult to treat. Because these two qualities are closely linked with careerism, corrective action indiscriminately applied can have negative side effects. Each of these factors makes careerism in the officer corps difficult to deal with.

V. Recommendations: If the officer corps is to halt the spread of careerism, three steps need to be taken. First, the officer corps must develop a common perception of careerism. Conferences, commander's calls, and individual counseling should form the basis for developing this perception. Second, because commanders must represent the standards of professional ethics, ethical character should be a principal selection criterion for command. Finally, personnel policies which foster a careerist orientation must be either mitigated or eliminated. The individual's role in the assignment process should be deemphasized, and the commander's role strengthened.

GETTING A GRIP ON CAREERISM

"Caution is the eldest child of wisdom."

--Victor Hugo

INTRODUCTION

The consensus is clear: the officer corps must come to grips with the self-serving, promotion-oriented behavior known as careerism. Military professionals view the careerist with disdain. Lieutenant Colonel John F. Shiner's comment is typical: "These parasites could spell national ruin should many of them advance to command positions" (19:1-35). Military reformists, from Richard A. Gabriel to Edward N. Luttwak, condemn the spread of careerism, warning, "If careerism becomes the general attitude, the very basis of leadership is destroyed" (8:200). The senior Air Force leadership also acknowledges careerism's dangers. According to a recent statement by Major General Ralph E. Havens, commander of the Air Force Military Personnel Center (AFMPC), "Many of our Air Force leaders have recently expressed concern that 'careerism' is having a disruptive effect on the development and retention of our officer force." For this reason, General Havens explained, the Air Force is mounting a major effort to make a "... basic philosophical change on an individual and on an institutional level" (29:1).

Efforts to purge the officer corps of careerism are long overdue. Unfortunately, careerism is much more elusive than most care to admit--a complex problem which is hard to pinpoint and even more difficult to treat. Overly-zealous, simplistic reforms could not only be ineffective, but also inadvertently distill valuable attributes from the officer corps. Therefore, corrective action must be carefully considered and judiciously applied. Iest a short-term fix result in even graver long-term problems.

This article examines the complexities of treating careerism. To lend historical perspective, the background to careerism will be outlined, followed by a discussion of how careerism is currently defined. Next, difficulties in

pinpointing and treating careerism will be discussed. Finally, recommendations to help the officer corps deal with careerism will be presented.

FROM OCCUPATIONALISM TO CAREERISM

According to military sociologists, the genesis of today's careerism lies in a shift in basic values within the officer corps. As Samuel P. Huntington observed in his classic work, The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations, one of the salient characteristics that has traditionally distinguished the officer corps is its view of the military as a ". . . 'higher calling' in the service of society" (5:8). However, a change in orientation was noted as early as 1960 in Morris Janowitz's book The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait. After interviewing 113 potential military leaders, Janowitz concluded:

Those who see the military profession as a calling or a unique profession are outnumbered by a greater concentration of individuals for whom the military is just another job. . . . for a sizable minority--about 20 percent, or one out of every five--no motive [for joining the military] could be discerned, except that the military was a job (6:117-118).

Janowitz is not the only military sociologist to document these findings. Charles C. Moskos, Jr. also wrote of a change in the officer corps' orientation, from institutionalism (in which the profession is viewed as a calling) toward occupationalism (just a job). The consequence, Moskos argues, is a shift from an attitude of self-sacrifice and moral commitment to one of materialism (15:2-3). With a deterioration of institutional values, military sociologists theorize, the concept of a calling higher than self diminishes.

In recent years, the officer corps has also recognized this shift in basic values. In 1970, Army Chief of Staff General William C. Westmoreland commissioned the Army War College (AWC) to assess the ethics and values of the officer corps. In light of the trend identified by Janowitz 10 years earlier, the results of the AWC study were both predictable and unsettling. A loss of ethical orientation was cited, to include ". . . selfish [,] promotion-oriented behavior," ". . . disloyalty to subordinates," and ". . . poor standards of ethical and professional behavior" (4:74-75). This loss of orientation has not been limited to the Army. According to a 1980 Air Command and Staff College report, 100 percent of officers surveyed felt ". . . most

fellow officers compromised their integrity to varying degrees" (30:vii). Most recently, an Industrial College of the Armed Forces report entitled Cohesion in the US Military observed, "The shift in orientation of the officers has weakened [their] corporate cohesion. Many officers view the military as a job that offers material rewards and individual success" (7:62). As the evidence mounted, military as well as civilian critics increasingly referred to occupationalist behavior as careerism.

CAREERISM DEFINED

There are a variety of definitions of careerism. In their book Crisis in Command: Mismanagement in the Army, Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage define careerism as ". . . self-seeking, the use of one's charge and command largely as a means to higher career rewards" (3:88). In another well-known reformist work entitled National Defense, James Fallows describes careerism as ". . . the desire to be, rather than the desire to do. It is the desire to have rank, rather than use it; the pursuit of promotion without a clear sense of what to do with a higher rank once one has attained it" (1:114). Members of the officer corps define careerism in similar terms. In his article "The Military Professional in America," Lieutenant Colonel John F. Shiner defines careerism as ". . . seek[ing] advancement for its own sake and [using] . . . it exclusively as a goal rather than as an opportunity or reward" (19:1-35). A similar conclusion was reached in an AFMPC study in June 1987, in which careerism was defined as "[c]areer-building as a deliberate aim; preoccupation with career advancement/promotion that supplants concern for basic duty performance" (32:1). Although other definitions exist, these are representative thoughts of both outside observers and members of the officer corps. For purposes of discussion, then, careerism is defined as the practice of placing self-interests above the interests of the organization, for the purpose of personal advancement.

Two aspects of careerism should be highlighted. First, self-interest is central to the definition. For this reason, careerism is generally considered the antithesis of professionalism, which stresses subordination of self-interests to the interests of the organization (5:63-64). By extension, the relationship between professionalism and careerism is a zero-sum game--when careerism prospers, professionalism suffers. Second, careerism is based on motivation. If, motivated by the lure of personal advancement, an individual places his own interests above the interests of the organization, he is by definition a careerist. However, another individual, performing the same act, can be called a professional if his

actions are motivated by altruism. On the surface, the simplicity of the definition implies careerism would be relatively easy to pinpoint and deal with. However, several factors complicate the process.

DIFFICULTIES IN PINPOINTING CAREERISM

In the struggle to pinpoint careerism, the most basic problem is few officers view it in exactly the same way. What constitutes careerist behavior is largely a matter of perception, and perceptions are rarely, if ever, uniform. The following scene from the popular film Top Gun provides a good illustration:

The commander, ramrod straight, faced his newly-assigned aircrews.

"Gentlemen. You are the top one percent of all naval aviators. The elite. The best of the best." He paused, surveying the eager faces in the crowded briefing room. "We'll make you better."

The commander began to pace the room, preaching the gospel of technical expertise and combat capability to his crews in measured tones. After a moment, Maverick casually leaned forward in his chair and turned to study the attentive faces behind him.

"What are you doing?" Goose whispered urgently.

Maverick turned back to his RIO with a grin. "Just wondering," he murmured in a low voice. "Who's the best?"

As if in reply, the commander's voice boomed out. "In case any of you wonder who the best is, they're up here on this plaque on the wall. The best driver and his RIO from each class has his name on it." He strode to the front of the room, then turned abruptly to face Maverick. He fixed the lieutenant with a cold stare. "You think your name is going to be on that plaque?"

There was an expectant hush in the room. All eyes turned to the young F-14 pilot in the front row. Maverick met the commander's steady gaze.

"Yes, Sir."

Several crewmembers exchanged disgusted looks, rolling their eyes in disbelief.

"That's pretty arrogant, considering the company you're in."

Maverick thought for a moment. "Yes, Sir," he replied in a firm voice.

The commander studied him for a moment, saying nothing. Finally, he gave a curt nod of approval. "I like that in a pilot." (34)

The interaction between Maverick and the commander can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, the crewmembers react to Maverick's self-assurance with disapproval. To them, his seemingly flippant remark reflects an attitude of selfishness, rather than team spirit. As his call sign suggests, Maverick has a reputation as a loner, one who views the world in terms of competition and is prepared to do whatever it takes to come out on top and make himself look good, even at the expense of his fellow officers. In this respect, he epitomizes the careerist. The commander, however, has a different perspective. In his eyes, Maverick's response is simply a reflection of a good fighter pilot's relentless pursuit of individual excellence and mastery over an opponent--the essence of a warrior. Careerism has nothing to do with it. This scene illustrates how a single event can be perceived in vastly different terms, depending upon the individual's frame of reference. In the same way, the officer corps' varied perceptions make careerism extremely difficult to deal with, because the officer corps lacks a common base line to evaluate its own behavior. What may be blatant careerism to one may be acceptable--or even desirable--behavior to another. "That so many officers believe careerism to be a problem in military service suggests an agreement on the facts," write Stromberg, Wakin, and Callahan. However, due to varying interpretations, "one person's careerism could be another's self-realization; one person's professionalism, another's insensitive consequentialism" (21:277). In this respect, careerism is in the eye of the beholder.

The difficulty in assessing individual motivation also contributes to the difficulty in pinpointing careerism. According to Samuel P. Huntington, the professional is motivated by a sense of responsibility to the profession (5:9). The careerist, on the other hand, is motivated by the lure of personal advancement. Consequently, whether or not an action constitutes careerism depends on whether the individual was motivated by a desire to serve the organization, or personal advancement. As an example, an officer who consistently takes on high-visibility additional duties in the squadron is considered a professional if motivated by a sincere desire to contribute to the unit's mission. However, if motivated solely by prospects of a good OER, he is a careerist. In theory, the difference between the two individuals is clear-cut. In reality, this black-or-white approach can easily lead to incorrect assumptions of what motivates peers or subordinates. Rather than stemming from one motive, human behavior often results

from several different, perhaps even conflicting, motives. Furthermore, behavior is much less consistent than people would like to believe, leading them to frequently make incorrect inferences as to what prompts an individual's behavior (26:41). To add to the confusion, sometimes the individual himself isn't aware of his true motives. For these reasons, motivation is extremely difficult to assess, making careerism difficult to reliably pinpoint. The result can be a series of erroneous judgments by a commander or an individual's peers, leading to an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust, and a rapid breakdown of unit cohesion.

Careerism, then, is difficult to pinpoint due to the lack of a common perception within the officer corps, coupled with the difficulties in assessing individual motivation. However, not only is careerism difficult to pinpoint, but several aspects of the military profession hinder an effective treatment of careerism.

DIFFICULTIES IN TREATING CAREERISM

By sending mixed signals to the field, the current personnel system makes careerism difficult to treat. Within the Air Force, careerism is decried as fostering an environment of selfishness that undermines the traditional military ethic of self-sacrifice. Yet, by the Air Force's own admission, many personnel policies actually reinforce a careerist orientation (29:1). Pilot retention provides a timely example. In an effort to halt the progressive decline in Cumulative Continuation Rate (CCR), a conference was recently sponsored by AFMPC. Major Air Command and Air Staff representatives met to consider a variety of measures designed to improve pilot retention. The primary recommendation to emerge from the conference was an increase in flight pay (9:1). This recommendation was followed by a proposal to offer pilots an annual bonus of \$12,000 to stay past their initial service obligation (22:1). Unfortunately, this approach to improving the CCR tends to reinforce the most pessimistic view of the officer corps as self-serving occupationalists, motivated by material gain. If this view is accurate, careerist incentives are bound to spawn more careerism. If this view is not accurate, the Air Force has not set a very high level of expectation for its officer corps. Either way, materialism does not appear to be a constructive solution. Moreover, if inadequate flight pay is in fact a principal cause for declining pilot retention (25:6), the Air Force has a larger problem than the CCR. The effects of the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 on the personnel system have also encouraged a careerist orientation within the officer corps (16:--). Title IV of the Act, which deals with joint officer personnel policies, requires officers promoted to

general or flag rank to have served in a joint duty assignment (28:H6857). The effect, according to General Thomas R. Morgan, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, is to force a choice ". . . between operational experience that will sharpen combat skills and administrative assignments that will enhance promotion potential" (18:10). As this legislation encourages young officers to scramble for joint duty assignments, careerism could be institutionalized to a much greater degree in the future, resulting in a corresponding decrease in combat capability (16:--). Against the current backdrop of anti-careerism, policies such as incentive pay and joint officer duty tend to send conflicting signals to the officer corps, thereby further muddying the water.

Another aspect which makes careerism difficult to treat is the close relationship between careerism and self-interest (35). As previously noted, self-interest is central to the definition of careerism. As a result, the officer corps tends to equate self-interest with careerism. In reality, they can be quite different. In an article entitled "Ethics of Leadership," Colonel Malham M. Wakin identifies two components of self-interest: self-development and selfishness.

We attribute selfishness to those who seek their own advantage without regard to the consequences of their actions for others or in spite [sic] of causing harm to others. To develop one's talents can be viewed as self-interested action, but it need not be selfish. Certainly, some self-interested actions can be morally right and justifiably encouraged. . . (24:254)

Although selfishness is clearly careerism, self-interested action which supports organizational goals is not, and can therefore be desirable. A good example is the Air Force non-resident Professional Military Education (PME) program. In recognition of the role of PME in professional development, the Air Force considers PME an important factor in career progression (14:65). If an individual enrolls in a PME program to enhance his chances for promotion, he is acting out of self-interest. However, this self-interested action is not careerism, because it meets PME's objective of developing expertise in the use of air power (27:8). In spite of the recent decision to disregard "early" PME accomplishment at promotion boards--i.e., Intermediate Service School at major boards and Senior Service School at lieutenant colonel boards--appropriately-timed PME remains an important factor for promotion (14:65). If all promotion boards were to disregard PME records, an important incentive for the officer to complete PME programs would be removed.

Presumably, an eventual reduction in the effectiveness of the officer corps would result.

Finally, formulating an effective approach toward careerism is complicated by the legitimate need for competitive spirit and ambition within the officer corps. Competitiveness is a basic ingredient of leadership, and the military cannot afford to be in short supply, particularly in combat. As General Douglas MacArthur pointed out, the mission of the profession of arms is to ". . . win our wars. Everything else in [the officer's] . . . professional career is but corollary to this vital dedication" (13:4-58). Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence adds that leadership requires ". . . very competitive individuals, [who possess] . . . a high degree of pride, and [who] satisfy that pride in achieving productive ends. More simply stated in the context that all in the military understand, they are fighters with a strong will to win" (12:4-61). Another crucial ingredient of leadership is ambition. As Lieutenant General Ira C. Eaker once observed, great leaders are not shy about seizing an opportunity. "If you find need for a leader and have to coax or urge your selection to take the job," Eaker said, "you'll be well advised [sic] to pass him over. He's not the man you need" (31:11). When taken to the extreme, however, these two virtues of competitiveness and ambition become the vices of the careerist. As Richard A. Gabriel charges in his book Military Incompetence: Why the US Military Doesn't Win, "Competition and careerism make every officer look out for himself. Such a system engenders values corrosive of any concept of the military as a special calling requiring special service and sacrifice" (2:13). Competition becomes destructive when it detracts from team spirit. Excessive ambition can have a similar effect, driving the careerist to pursue personal achievement at the expense of mission effectiveness or unit welfare. Worse yet, to the extent an ambitious individual indulges in careerism, he tends to encourage careerism in others. The result can be a self-perpetuating situation in which careerists who advance into leadership positions teach others to either follow their example, or get out of the service (1:172). Competitiveness and ambition, then, can be valuable attributes when properly channeled, or destructive influences if allowed to run rampant. To avoid the latter situation, a clear distinction must be made between legitimate, and destructive, competitiveness and ambition. Otherwise, these two important leadership qualities could be distilled out of the officer corps by heavy-handed reforms, thereby having a direct impact on combat effectiveness.

The varied perceptions of careerism, the difficulty in assessing individual motivation, the mixed signals sent to the officer corps by the personnel system, the close relationship between self-interest and careerism, and the

need for competition and ambition within the military make careerism difficult to pinpoint and treat. Immoderate reforms, hastily conceived and indiscriminately applied, can have opposite effects than those intended. However, given patience and a long-term perspective, careerism can be effectively treated.

GETTING A GRIP ON CAREERISM

Three important steps can be taken to help the officer corps get a grip on careerism without generating unintended side effects. First, the officer corps must develop a common perception of careerism. Second, strong, ethical leadership is needed at all levels to control careerism. Finally, systemic changes are required to eliminate the personnel policies which foster a careerist orientation.

The officer corps cannot realize a basic philosophical change toward careerism without a common understanding of what careerism is, as well as what it isn't. While it's unlikely careerism will ever be perceived by the entire officer corps in exactly the same way, a common understanding of careerism and its effects is needed to provide a basis for action. At present, careerism is like pornography: few can define it, but everyone claims to recognize it when he sees it. Understandably, the search for careerism generally begins with others, rather than with oneself. As Stromberg, Wakin, and Callahan point out, "Most talk about careerism centers, . . . , on the alleged careerism of other people. It is often easier to censure others for self-seeking motives than to identify similar motives in oneself" (21:277). In order to facilitate self-examination, the causes and effects of careerism should be subjects of discussion at all levels, from the smallest units to the Air Staff. Conferences, commander's calls, and individual counseling can be useful avenues for developing an awareness of the dangers of careerism (20:211). Equally important, however, is a discussion of what careerism isn't. When properly channeled, self-interested action, competitiveness, and ambition are not careerism, but hallmarks of winning organizations. Likewise, eagerness is not careerism, nor is striving to be the very best at one's profession. The officer corps must understand this, lest misdirected peer pressure discourage the individual's desire to excel.

Even with this common understanding, the officer corps will be able to control careerism only to the extent commanders are stewards of professional ethics. In an organization which searches for role models, strong, ethical leadership must be the standard. Commanders should be selected largely on the basis of ethical character, as it is

their example which will teach the individual to draw the line between self-interested action and selfishness, competitiveness and antagonism, ambition and greed. An awareness of where to draw the line will give the officer corps the confidence it needs to aggressively pursue individual excellence, as well as the wisdom to occasionally stop and get its ethical bearings (10:591). Led by commanders who set high ethical standards for the organization, the individual will be inspired to place duty above self. Led by commanders who set expedient standards, the individual will be inspired to look out for himself. Without an example of ethical leadership, even a basic philosophical change on the individual level will eventually give way to the pressures of careerism.

Finally, the personnel system must stop sending mixed signals to the field. As the earlier example of pilot retention pointed out, raising flight pay as a primary incentive to keep pilots in the Air Force is inconsistent with urging the officer corps to return to the institutional values of "duty, honor, country." Furthermore, such incentives could exacerbate the problems of specialization within the officer corps, create animosity between rated and non-rated officers, and further weaken the profession's corporate identity. Instead of occupationalist incentives, the Air Force should explore institutional incentives to keep pilots from leaving the service. To enhance their promotability, pilots should be able to remain in the cockpit--at the tip of the spear--rather than forced to accept career-broadening assignments by the realities of the promotion system. Such a change would not only eliminate a major source of pilot dissatisfaction (25:6), but shift the measure of performance from ticket-punching to fulfilling the professional officers' principle obligation--improving combat capability. As Marine Major Robert B. Neller so astutely put it, "If any group within the Corps, or any of the Services, should be given an edge at promotion time, it should be those individuals who possess the leadership and tactical expertise in warfighting skills and can lead us to victory in war" (16:20). Assignment policies should also be examined for careerist orientation, particularly in light of the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act. AFMPC should minimize the individual officer's direct involvement in the assignment process, and instead rely on the commander's judgment (33:--). Assignments should be based more on the commander's assessment of where the individual can best serve, rather than the individual's perception of what would be best for his career. In this regard, the newly-announced assignment policy of considering an officer's qualifications before his volunteer status (17:1) is an encouraging step toward eliminating the square-filling, self-serving behavior so devastating to unit cohesion. Finally, to nurture the attitude of "send me

where I can best serve," the promotion system should encourage highly-qualified officers to accept difficult assignments for the good of the service, as well as the individual. As Harry G. Summers notes, "You want people to be ambitious. You want people to seek out difficult jobs. What you need to bring out is that the jobs that enhance their careers are the most difficult to do. . . . what we need is a structure, a system where what's important pays" (11:210). If the military is to build such a structure, the personnel system must stop rewarding careerism on the one hand, while seeking to eliminate careerism on the other.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, action must be taken to arrest the development of careerism within the officer corps. To the extent this trend is allowed to continue, the fundamental ethics which stress duty over self will further deteriorate. Although military reformists, senior military leaders, and the officer corps itself are in agreement of the need for reform, getting a grip on careerism is not as easy as its clear-cut definition suggests. Lack of a common perception within the officer corps makes careerism difficult to pinpoint, as does the inability to accurately assess individual motivation. To further cloud the issue, some personnel policies foster a careerist orientation. Finally, the close relationship between careerism and self-interested action, competitiveness, and ambition also make quick, easy solutions unlikely. The officer corps, it seems, is stuck between a rock and a hard place--faced with a grave problem which demands immediate attention, yet unable to implement a rapid solution for fear of unforeseen consequences.

Solving the enigma of careerism must start at the source: the officer corps. Careerism must be examined in the light of day and seen as a betrayal of the ethic of "duty, honor, country." At the same time, legitimate forms of self-interest, as well as competitiveness and ambition, must be separated from careerism and preserved as valuable assets. Strong, ethical leadership is needed to properly channel these assets, as well as to inspire selfless dedication in the officer corps. Finally, systemic changes are necessary to ensure personnel policies reinforce, rather than diminish, the traditional values of the profession of arms.

Regardless of the solution adopted, one thing should be borne in mind: lasting philosophical changes on the individual and institutional level will not come quickly or easily. Just as there are no miracle cures for the scourge of careerism, neither can a heavy-handed approach be without undesirable side effects. Lieutenant General

Walter F. Ulmer, a former superintendent of the US Military Academy, wryly observed the military tends to zealously overreact to fundamental ethical dilemmas. "Most mischief and lack of motivation in our systems," General Ulmer concluded, "is caused by well-intentioned policies promulgated by a dedicated chain of command" (23:55). As the controlled OER system of the 1970's so graphically illustrates, even the best intentions can have disastrous results. This painful lesson should be kept uppermost in mind as individual and institution attempt to get a grip on the slippery issue of careerism.

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