

Junior Officer Career Progression:

A Reevaluation

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Introduction

As the Long War against terror continues, many company grade officers are choosing to separate from the Army. This is due to a variety of factors, including, stress on families due to multiple deployments, and the inability to attend advanced schooling. As a result our formations are suffering from a lack of captains. Occurring simultaneously in the institutional Army, Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), is struggling to provide relevant training for units deploying to an ever changing battlefield. In order to address both issues, the Army should restructure young officers' career progression. Officers should serve a tour of duty within Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) after their first operational tour within Forces Command (FORCOM), thus increasing retention rates among captains, manning Army TRADOC schools and Army accessions with combat veterans, providing the most current institutional knowledge, with the additional benefit of filling company command billets with more mature and prepared commanders.

Retention of Captains

For the past few years the Army has seen a disturbing trend among captains. Many voluntarily resign their commissions after their initial service obligation. Daniel

Morgan, an Army Captain, stated "Lieutenants, captains and majors are leaving the Army in droves. Officers are getting promoted to captain in approximately three and a half years, and they still depart the ranks for the private sector."¹ As a result the Army has had to reassess its readiness in the area of junior officer manning. Last year, LT GEN Michael Rochelle, the deputy chief of staff, G-1, stated that "continued Army readiness requires that we pursue programs that recognize the service and sacrifices of our soldiers."² The Army has attempted to recognize the service and sacrifices of its junior officers by offering captains a menu of incentives in return for three more years of service. These incentives include a chance to attend advanced civilian schooling later in their career, choice of duty station, or a cash bonus ranging from 25,000 to 35,000 dollars depending on the officer's military occupational specialty.³

Much like the captain's menu of incentives, a tour of service within TRADOC would address some of the reasons why

¹ Daniel S. Morgan, "Departing the Army: Don't Take It Lightly," *Army* 51, no.2 (2001): 15.

² Michael D. Rochelle, "G-1: Preserving The All-Volunteer Army," *Army* 58, no. 10 (2008): 187.

³ Army Human Resources Command. "FY 2008/2009 Officer Menu of Incentives Program (Regular Army)," *MILPER Message Number: 08-093*, <http://www.hrc.army.mil/site/protect/Active/opfamdd/Retention/LDD12htm>

junior officers leave the Army. A study published in Military Psychology journal in 2005 stated:

For officers who intended to leave the military, major themes involved (a) OPTEMPO (specifically, the number and length of deployments), (b) family concerns, (c) not meeting personal goals in the Army, and (d) lack of educational opportunities in their chosen area.⁴

A second tour of service within TRADOC would result in several benefits for junior officers. The first is the ability to spend more time with family. Although various positions within TRADOC can be very time consuming, they pale in comparison to the time and space that separate a family during a fifteen month deployment. A TRADOC tour would allow married soldiers the opportunity to plan a family, to have children, and to just be present in their family for more than one consecutive year. In addition, a TRADOC tour would afford the opportunity for advanced civilian education [applies to all officers]. Depending on the job, officers would have the opportunity to earn their Masters Degree in their spare time. The benefits of a

⁴ Amy B. Adler and others, "The Impact of Operations Tempo on Turnover Intentions of Army Personnel," *Military Psychology* 17, no. 3 (2005): 175-202.

TRADOC tour would certainly contribute to junior officer retention.

Institutional Knowledge

The benefits of having officers serve their second tour within TRADOC are not solely for the individual officer; the Army also has much to gain from this arrangement. TRADOC would get combat proven leaders fresh from the battlefields of our current War on Terror. A rotating crop of young officers newly returned from battle has value for Army training schools such as the Basic Officer Leader's Course (BOLC), the National Training Center (NTC), and the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC). This is already happening to a certain degree at each of these schools. Captains Steve Wasilausky and Rod Morgan are excellent examples of this, "both experienced company trainers at the National Training Center (NTC)...have commanded soldiers in combat; they have also now observed and controlled countless company level leaders preparing units for combat at NTC."⁵ However, if TRADOC was a mandatory second tour for all officers, all of these schools would maintain a fresh knowledge base of the most current tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), school

⁵ Anonymous, "CompanyCommand Building Combat-Ready Teams: Scorpion Reflections," *Army* 58, no. 8 (2008): 59.

curricula would remain current, and training scenarios would replicate reality. Last year GEN William Wallace, the commanding general of TRADOC spoke of the need to stay relevant, "Through continued institutional adaptation across doctrine, organization, training, material, leadership and education, personnel and facilities domains and leveraging of full spectrum operations, TRADOC will continue to ensure that victory truly does start here."⁶ Additionally, the Army Accessions Command (AACOM) would find these young officers valuable for their organizations. Recruiting and ROTC would have new combat proven officers to tell the Army story to potential recruits and cadets. These young officers would be equipped to answer the tough questions that potential officers and soldiers have about Army life and combat. Training and Doctrine Command is constantly striving to remain relevant to serve the operating forces; having junior officers serve their second tour with TRADOC helps realize this goal.

Mature Company Commanders

An additional benefit to having junior officers serve their second tour within a TRADOC unit is that it affords

⁶ William S. Wallace, "Training and Doctrine Command: All About the Soldier," *Army* 58, no.10 (2008): 85.

them time to prepare for company command. Company command is one of the most demanding jobs in the Army. In his prescriptive book for junior officers, MAJ GEN John Meyer stated "Company Command is the most demanding job in the Army. It's the toughest job you'll have as a captain, one of the toughest jobs you'll have during your career."⁷ However, the current officer progression timeline (36 months for promotion to captain, and 6 months at a Captain's Career Course), pushes captains into command without time to mature or mentally prepare for this demanding job. One former company commander recently commented, "As a company commander, I think I was so overwhelmed at some points that I couldn't see the forest for the trees. Now I have a better understanding of how and why we do things in the Army."⁸ This company commander may have felt a little less overwhelmed if he was better prepared. Young captains may feel better prepared after an additional two to three years to reflect on their first tour of duty, and prepare for their next operational assignment, the most demanding job in the Army.

Opposing Viewpoints

⁷ John G. Meyer, JR, *Company Command The Bottom Line* (Alexandria:Byrrd Enterprises, 1996), 7.

⁸ Anonymous, *CompanyCommand*, 62.

One of the main arguments against the proposal to send officers to TRADOC after their first operational tour is that the Army culture would not accept this proposal. Individuals within the officer corps may see leaving FORCOM for TRADOC as weakness, and a career impediment. The feeling that a TRADOC assignment is less important than an operational assignment is evidenced by the fact that last year GEN William Wallace, commanding general of TRADOC, stated "As I travel around the Army, I constantly remind soldiers ...that their contributions to the war effort are not measured by their proximity to the enemy but by their commitment and dedication to the mission, our soldiers, and their families"⁹ More needs to be done to reinforce the fact that positions within TRADOC are vital to the Army.

One example of cultural acceptance of institutional billets within their service is the Marine Corps. After a Marine officer's first duty assignment in the Fleet Marine Forces they are generally required to serve in a B billet. B billets range from recruiting duty to instructor billets at various schools.¹⁰ However, this model is not completely similar to the Army TRADOC proposal, because there are other B billet assignments that are deployable. However,

⁹ William S. Wallace, *Training and Doctrine*, 85.

¹⁰ Marine Corps Online, *The MOS Manuel MCO P1200.7 part 2*, <http://www.marines.mil/news/publications>.

generally Marine Corps B billets are equivalent to Army billets within TRADOC. The culture within the Marine Corps accepts B Billets as normal throughout an officer's career progression. Ultimately, the officer and the Marine Corps benefit from this arrangement. Similarly, the Army should accept TRADOC assignments as career enhancing billets, and not impediments.

Conclusion

While conducting offensive operations, there are times when a unit must take a tactical pause to regroup, reorganize, and reorient itself in order to manage the tempo of battle. Similarly, throughout an officer's career he must take calculated tactical pauses during key moments to regroup, reorganize, and refocus. By rotating young captains into TRADOC for a service tour following FORCOM, the officers are given a tactical pause in their career. They are afforded the opportunity to grow personally, to contribute to the development of the larger Army, and to prepare themselves professionally. The end result is a better officer and a stronger Army.

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Notes

1. Daniel S. Morgan, "Departing the Army: Don't Take It Lightly," *Army* 51, no.2 (2001): 15.
2. Michael D. Rochelle, "G-1: Preserving The All-Volunteer Army," *Army* 58, no. 10 (2008): 187.
3. Army Human Resources Command. "FY 2008/2009 Officer Menu of Incentives Program (Regular Army)," *MILPER Message Number: 08-093*, <http://www.hrc.army.mil/site/protect/ActiveOpfamdd/Retention/LDD12htm>
4. Amy B. Adler and others, "The Impact of Operations Tempo on Turnover Intentions of Army Personnel," *Military Psychology* 17, no. 3 (2005): 175-202.
5. Anonymous, "CompanyCommand Building Combat-Ready Teams: Scorpion Reflections," *Army* 58, no. 8 (2008): 59.
6. William S. Wallace, "Training and Doctrine Command: All About the Soldier," *Army* 58, no.10 (2008): 85.
7. John G. Meyer, JR, *Company Command The Bottom Line* (Alexandria:Byrrd Enterprises, 1996), 7.
8. Anonymous, *CompanyCommand*, 62.
9. William S. Wallace, *Training and Doctrine*, 85.
10. Marine Corps Online, *The MOS Manuel MCO P1200.7 part 2*, <http://www.marines.mil/news/publications>.

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