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OPMS II: THE PERSPECTIVE OF A LOGISTICAL SERVICES OFFICER

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OPMS II: THE PERSPECTIVE OF A LOGISTICAL SERVICES OFFICER

A MONOGRAPH

by

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ABSTRACT

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The author reviews briefly the conditions existing in the technical services prior to the reorganization of the Army in 1962. Using this perspective as a point of departure, he discusses the origins, objectives, and key features of the Officer Personnel Management System II (OPMS II). The importance of troop command is developed concurrently. The key features of OPMS II, dual skill development (primary and alternate specialties), Department of the Army selection of troop commanders, and changes in the promotion system, are analyzed to determine how they will affect the logistics services officer. The author concludes that OPMS II is a viable system for logistics services officers, but it does present some difficulties. His major concern is the insidious deemphasis of troop command because the outstanding logistics services officers will perceive that troop command is neither necessary for a successful career nor worth the risk. The author sees this as a reversion to pre-1962 conditions.

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INTRODUCTION

When the author came into the Ordnance Corps during the late fifties, the various technical services were commanded by their respective branch chiefs. The Ordnance Corps was structured around commodities and commodity commands, specifically missile, tank-automotive, munitions, and armament or weapons. Missiles were just starting to emerge as sophisticated weapons of war and international competition. The Korean War was behind us and the Vietnam conflict was in the future. The officers assigned to the commodity commands were impressive in their competence, zeal, and determination. It was an exciting time, and to be part of the weapon system acquisition process was challenging in every way.

Project 80, a major reorganization of the Army, was implemented in 1962.[1] Key features of the reorganization were the elimination of the technical services branch chiefs and the formation of new command structures such as the Army Materiel Command and the Combat Developments Command. The impact upon the technical or logistical services was great, but changes in the field did not occur immediately. People had a tendency to remain where they were. The author found himself in Europe during this period, serving at the unit or troop level. The general impression formed of many of these logistics services officers serving at the troop level was not good. Competence was lacking and many key positions were occupied by officers with limited retention on active duty. Why was this so? Why did it seem

that most of the outstanding officers were heavily involved in research and development, procurement, and weapons systems acquisition rather than serving in the field with troops where they were needed at least as much if not more?

The Vietnam War changed the trend. The buildup of men and troop units with the concomitant emphasis upon troop leadership resulted in an awareness of the necessity for the best people to command troops, regardless of echelon or branch. Promotion and other selection boards have verified this awareness on many occasions.[2] It is interesting to note that a recent survey of the officer students in the class of 1973, the US Army Command and General Staff College, indicated a strong preference for troop command.[3]

In view of the foregoing and the experiences and observations of the author as a recent personnel management officer in the Officer Personnel Directorate, Office of Personnel Operations, the Department of the Army, this paper seeks to address the Army's new concept of officer personnel management with respect to its impact on the logistic services. The Officer Personnel Management System II (OPMS II) is a dynamic system and is now being implemented, in some cases, with changes far different from what was originally envisioned. What follows is an analysis of that system as seen through the eyes of a logistics services officer, and although the paper is of necessity confined to the logistics services (Ordnance, Transportation, Quartermaster and Chemical), certain aspects are applicable to any branch.

OPMS II

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

OPMS II is the outgrowth of guidance furnished the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER) by the Chief of Staff of the Army on 16 October 1970.[4] That guidance concerned Army professionalism and directed that efforts be made in several areas, one of which was "the philosophy and mechanics of officer career management."[5] Interestingly enough, or ironically, OPMS II is traceable to the My Lai incident since this notorious episode and its subsequent investigation caused the Chief of Staff to direct the Army War College to study officer corps professionalism.[6] Based upon this study and subsequent discussions the guidance previously mentioned was issued to the DCSPER. OMPS II is the ultimate product which resulted from the efforts of the DCSPER and his steering committee, and its objectives are

> First, to increase the professional competence of the officer corps through greater regard for concentrated assignment; second, to provide greater career satisfaction by allowing an officer more voice in career development to do the jobs he does best; and third, to insure equitable career opportunity by providing multiple pathways to success.[7]

MAIN FEATURES

In consonance with the objectives of OPMS II, certain key features of the new officer personnel management system have emerged. The first was called dual track development of officers, but this termonology has evolved into primary and alternate specialty areas.

The concept envisions that each captain will pick or identify his primary and alternate specialties at some point in his career development, probably during attendance at his branch advanced course. The primary specialty for most officers will be branch oriented while the alternate specialty may be either an out-of-branch specialty or a second branch specialty. Variations of this pattern are expected, but they will be dependent upon the individual's qualifications. In any case, each captain must be qualified in a branch specialty. A major's development is similar with the proviso that he must meet certain qualifications in his alternate specialty by the time he is eligible for promotion to lieutenant colonel. The major becomes qualified by having the combination of an assignment and an advanced degree in the same related specialty area, or by having more than one assignment in his alternate specialty. At least one assignment will be in the grade of major. If all goes according to schedule, each officer will have a specialty, in which he will receive the majority of his future assignments, determined when he is selected for promotion to lieutenant colonel. At the same time those officers eligible for troop command will be considered for command positions at their request.[8]

Perhaps the most revolutionary concept embodied in OPMS II is the troop command selection system, a system whereby separate Department of the Army selection boards will be convened to select troop commanders for the combat arms, the combat support arms, and the logistics services. The first of these boards, which selected colonel-level troop commanders, has adjourned, and those officers

selected have been notified.[9] A key aspect of the command selection process was the identification of some 288 colonel and 842 lieutenant colonel positions as troop command designated positions. The break-out of command positions by officer groupings as of 30 June 1972 is shown in Figure 1.[10]

TROOP COMMAND POSITIONS

Colonel
Active Duty Strength, 30 June 1972, Colonels 5762

	Table of Organization and Equipment	Tables of Distribution and Allowances	Total
Combat arms	95	59	154
Combat support arms	30	45	75
Logistics services	19	18	37
Specialized commands (aviation, division support command, psychological operations groups)	19	3	22
Total	163	125	288

Lieutenant Colonel
Active Duty Strength 30 June 1972, Lieutenant Colonels 12,807

Combat arms	332	145	478
Combat support arms	143	72	214
Logistics services	91	15	106
Specialized commands (aviation, psychological operations battalions)	37	7	44
Total	603	239	842

Figure 1

An early point of contention for the OPMS II planners was the identification of the troop command positions since many key management positions, such as project managers and depot commanders, were purposely excluded. Their exclusion was based upon the definition of troop command positions.

> Troop command positions are defined as those positions in which the ability to lead, manage, and work effectively with troops is the prime factor in accomplishment of the unit mission and in which competence as troop commanders as contrasted to managerial or technical competence is of paramount importance for effective discharge of command responsibilities.[11]

Obviously, for OPMS II to be accepted, the promotion system must support and lend credibility to the assertions that no officer will be disadvantaged in terms of career opportunity, nor will officers become second class citizens due to non-selection for troop command. As originally envisioned, promotion boards would be formed from specific career fields. In other words, logistics officers would select logistics officers for promotion, combat arms would select combat arms, and so on. This concept was discarded because it would have required Congressional approval and the modification of Title 10, United States Code.[12] The Chief of Staff of the Army specifically stipulated that OMPS II should not require new legislation from Congress.[13] Consequently, the promotion system has been revised to include expanded membership on selection boards so as to better represent all officer groupings, career fields, and specialties. Furthermore, instructions to the boards will be modified, stressing the "whole man" concept. And finally, the preeminence of the combat arms will be maintained as reflected in the approximate 55% combat arms board membership.[14]

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

It was never intended that OPMS II be implemented by a specific date. Many of its revolutionary changes will take years to become truly effective or to be accepted by the officer corps. Being a dynamic system, it is constantly subject to change although its basic precepts are intended to remain firm. Some of the more recent developments that have occurred are the elimination of troop command as a separate specialty and the designation of logistics as a branch career field for Ordnance, Transportation, Quartermaster, and Chemical Corps officers. The Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics (DCSLOG) and the Commanding General, the Army Materiel Command (AMC) have urged the formation of a logistics corps for a number of years.[15] The logistics corps would be formed by the merger of the branches listed above (the Chemical Corps will be absorbed by the Ordnance Corps as part of the reorganization of the Army scheduled for 1973)[16], and this merger will take place at the career management level in the near future.[17] Even though the separate branch identities, Ordnance, Quartermaster, and Transportation, will be retained for the present their ultimate dissolution and the emergence of a logistics corps seems to be only a matter of time.

PERSPECTIVE

TROOP COMMAND

To have Department of the Army boards select lieutenant colonels and colonels for troop command positions implies several things.

First, the present system, whereby troop commanders are selected by individual career branches in coordination with the concerned commands, may not be working; second, the Department of the Army must want the very best officers in command of troops during the trauma of post-Vietnam draw down, drug and racial issues, and in general, a period of military decline; and third, troop commands must be extremely important positions to warrant such critical and close attention. The first implication would seem to be borne out by the results of a recent survey of 178 general officers who commanded in Vietnam. Their replies indicated that they ranked only 54% of their battalion and brigade commanders in the outstanding category, 34% only satisfactory, and the remaining 12% unsatisfactory.[18]

One of the more significant charges that occurred in the evolution of OPMS II was the elimination of command as a separate specialty. Apparently, this decision was based upon the premise that troop command could logically fall within the career pattern of a specialty area. For example, an officer whose specialty area is Infantry can aspire to command an Infantry battalion, brigade, and so on right up the line as part of his primary specialty area. Similarly, a logistics services officer, whose primary specialty area is maintenance, can hope to be selected for command of a maintenance battalion; or an officer whose forte is food service could be selected for command of a supply and transportation/services battalion. This change, the elimination of command as a separate specialty, has been a great break for logistics services officers. It is a historical fact that most division support commands have been commanded by

combat arms officers. The opportunities for logistics services officers to command troops at the colonel level are sorely limited and are dramatically reduced thereafter. Logistics general officers are conspicuous by their absence from the command structure or positions of an Army division, although a very rare opportunity exists when logistical commands are established. To have maintained troop command as a separate specialty or career field would have refuted the OPMS II tenet of equal opportunity for all officers.

It would seem that the logistics services officer is confronted by a paradox. The importance of troop command has been established in many ways, the latest being the Department of the Army selection boards. On the other hand, troop command opportunities for him would appear as converging lines or as if he were looking into a funnel from the big end. How important is troop command for a logistics services officer? Referring back to Figure 1, the list of designated troop command positions for colonels and lieutenant colonels, logistics services command positions are approximately 13% of the Army total, a percentage neither imposing nor insignificant. But numbers don't tell the whole story! If the one maintenance battalion commander in a division is incompetent, the operational capabilities of the division might be severely handicapped or limited. The same case can be made for the commander of the transportation battalion, or the supply and services/transportation battalion. And the backup or general support battalions are just as critical. Perhaps the best way to answer the question of how important troop commanders are to the logistics services officers is to ask another

question. How important are they to the Army today when the military establishment is so committed to efficient utilization of resources and making every dollar count?

The gut issue confronting every logistics services officer is whether or not to opt for troop command. Inherent in the troop command selection process is the requirement that the individual officer must personally accept or decline consideration by the selection board. For a combat or combat support arms officers to decline troop command would seemingly require a great deal of courage, but the same pressures are not exerted upon the logistics services officer. An article in the Army Times dated 13 December 1972, concerning troop command selections for colonels, pointed out that "many colonels had indicated before the board met that they were more interested in a specialist assignment than a command assignment."[19] A recent discussion with a DCSPER representative revealed, that of those colonels eligible for selection as troop commanders, more logistics services officers declined consideration by the selection board than the combat arms and combat support officers.[20] The significant point is that officers of all groupings declined consideration before future promotion boards had the chance to pass judgement on the sagacity of similar decisions. Consider the prevailing atmosphere when their decisions were made and then project ahead several years when, in fact, promotion boards will have given credence to the concept of success without the necessity of having commanded troops. It is probably a fair assumption that the percentage of declinations will increase in all officer groupings but particularly in the logistics services.

PRIMARY AND ALTERNATE SPECIALTIES

The concept of dual skill development, or primary and alternate specialties, will reinforce the perception of logistics services officers that troop command is not essential to a successful career. An Officer Personnel Directorate briefing document states that "the object is to give each officer the opportunity to manage his own career, consistent with Army requirements, by electing to do what he does best, without feeling compelled to seek troop command in order to have a successful career."[21] Such statements are strong inducements for those officers leaning away from troop command, particularly if they have managed to develop some expertise in specialized areas. A recent study of the US Army Command and General Staff College majors in the class of 1972 revealed that approximately 40% believed they would be best utilized as specialists rather than generalists. And the percentage rose to 62% of the logistics services officers.[22] In an essay by Kurt Lang entitled "Technology and Career Management in the Military Establishment," one of the essays in Morris Janowitz's The New Military, a strong case is made for the specialist. Lang points out the generalist approach, that "the preparation of each officer, or at least the majority, as a potential commander clashes with day-to-day organizational effectiveness."[23] Rational thought and reasoning supports the need of specialists in the modern world of burgeoning technology. And, ipso facto, the logistics services officer is a specialist.

The dual skill development system formalizes the system it is designed to replace, the Special Officer Career Programs. Members

of these special programs such as Comptroller, Atomic Energy, Research and Development theoretically alternated assignments in their specialist areas with assignments that were branch oriented. At best this system was marginally effective because of the many demands upon an officer's time. Periods of military and civil schooling, overseas equity, and branch immaterial assignments are typical of those demands. Dual skill development hopes to have the officer qualified in his alternate specialty prior to consideration for promotion to lieutenant colonel. He would be considered qualified after two successful assignments in the alternate specialty, or one such assignment and the attainment of an advanced degree in a related discipline. Earlier it was noted that troop command had been eliminated as a separate specialty. Would it be possible to pursue troop command in the primary or branch specialty and also become proficient in the alternate specialty? To make an intelligent decision as to whether or not to opt for command, the logistics services officer must ask this question?

A POSSIBLE CAREER PATTERN

Before describing a possible career pattern for the logistical services officer, it would be appropriate to mention certain constraints and assumptions. First, to be competitive for selection as a troop commander, the officer would most likely be required to demonstrate his ability at the unit level to include a successful company command tour; second, the officer would be subject to the needs of the Army to include overseas and branch immaterial assignments;

and third, the OPMS II objective is to become proficient in the alternate specialty prior to consideration for promotion to lieutenant colonel with at least one alternate specialty assignment as a major. Figure 2 depicts a typical career pattern for the logistics services officer if he aspires to troop command while becoming qualified in an alternate specialty with a related advanced degree.

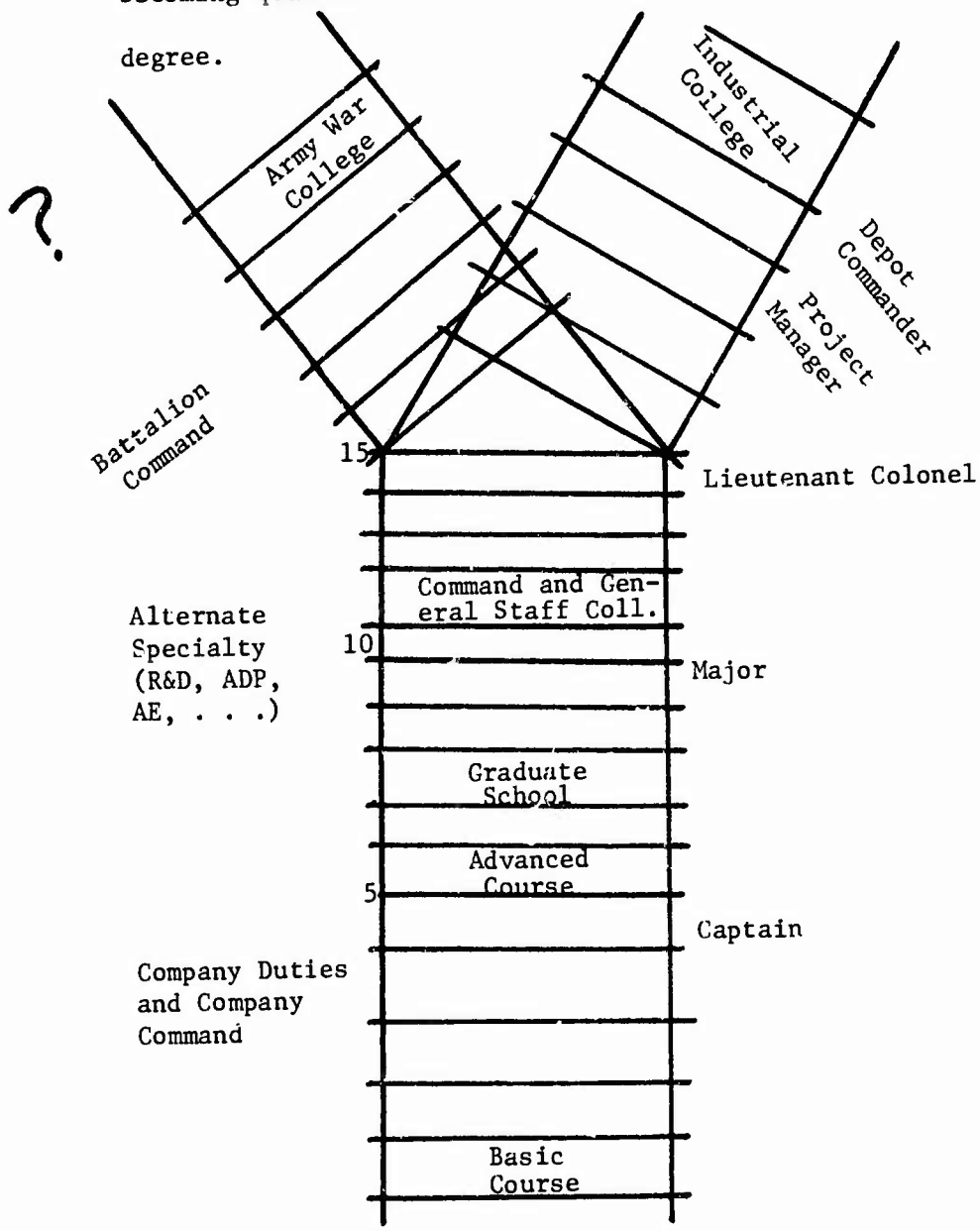

Figure 2

Theoretically, the career pattern depicted should be a viable one, particularly if time intervals for promotion and school selections increase. But what about the real world! What happens to the career pattern if the officer is required to serve a long tour overseas prior to becoming qualified in his alternate specialty? What will be the effect of branch immaterial assignments? Is it better to have an alternate specialty assignment as a company grade officer and then seek company command after the advanced course? Or will an officer be considered competitive for battalion command if his last troop assignment was 10 years prior?

If it is assumed that the officer is successful in being selected as a troop commander and serves his tour, what then? Will it be too late to become properly qualified in his alternate specialty? Is it possible to switch over from the primary specialty, when the successful troop command tour has been accomplished, to the alternate specialty where he would be competing with officers who had declined troop command? And will these same officers be better qualified for managerial positions of great responsibility such as project manager or depot commander because they had concentrated their efforts towards developing their expertise in a specialty area rather than accept the opportunity to command troops? These are tough questions deserving answers, but who can provide them! The point has already been made that there is not much of a future at the higher echelons of troop command for the logistics services officer. Why then, should a young logistics services officer aspire to troop command where the

risk factor is great and he is confronted with uncertainties? He will do so only if it is in his best interests, a personal desire, or because he has no choice.

PROMOTION OPPORTUNITIES

Every officer is interested in being promoted on schedule with his contemporaries and in being selected for those military schools essential to his professional development. Recognizing that every logistics services officer will not or cannot become Commanding General, the Army Materiel Command, or the Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, a certain number will undoubtedly attain general officer rank. An argument might be made to support the contention that under the aegis of OPMS II, the logistics services officer may have a better chance at being promoted to general officer if he specializes to the extent that due to his expertise and abilities he is selected to fill a vital technical position. The Secretary of the Army places his prestige and power behind such an argument by saying in a recent newspaper article, "We won't know if the system [OPMS II] works until we start seeing officers advancing to general through the specialist and technical routes."[24] He goes on to say that under OPMS II officers must become qualified in a skill other than branch assignments with the goal being to permit officers to serve in their specialist jobs without hindering their chances for promotion, and that OPMS II solves the problem that an officer must come up through the command structure to make general officer.[25] It seems reasonable to expect continued high level support of OPMS II concepts, and promotion

boards of the future will reflect this support. The foregoing comments, taken in conjunction with the vagaries of the primary and alternate specialty routes, strengthen the previous assertion that logistics services officers may well turn away from troop command. And this would be unfortunate for the Army.

CONCLUSIONS

OPMS II is a viable system, and although not necessarily creating more pathways to success, it will create different ones. The new system will increase specialization in the Army, particulary in the logistics services. It will afford certain officers the opportunity to progress to general officer rank without the necessity of commanding troops. There can be no real argument against these aspects of OPMS II. But OPMS II also creates the conditions that will lead to the insidious deemphasis of troop command within the logistics services. The rot has started already and positive actions are needed to excise it before it spreads. It may be too late. Just as every phase of Man's existence seems to repeat itself, the Army may be reverting to the suspect thinking of the period just prior to the reorganization of 1962 when the separate technical services seemed to be answerable to no one, and when the best logistics officers gravitated toward managerial or specialized positions leaving troop commands in the hands of second rate commanders. Simplicity and ease of maintenance become sacrificed to the gods of sophistication and complexity at such times. We cannot afford a dichotomy between those specialitsts and experts who think they know what is best for

the troops and those troop commanders who know what is needed in the field because they have been there.

Lord Slim, in his article "Leadership in Management," states:

> Leadership is of the spirit, compounded of personality and vision--its practice is an art. Management is of the mind, more a matter of accurate calculation, statistics, methods, timetables, and routine--its practice is a science. Managers are necessary; leaders are essential.[26]

I disagree. In today's complex world they are both essential, and there is more than a little overlap. OPMS II will tend to separate the two.

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