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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TRAINING AND EDUCATING
THE STRATEGIC CORPORAL

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Executive Summary

Title: Training and Educating the Strategic Corporal

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Thesis: A systemic training and education continuum for the NCO will produce a technically and procedurally proficient leader with the inherent ability to apply desired judgment in decision making, thus achieving the consistent capability of a "Strategic Corporal."

Discussion: The United States Marine Corps is obligated to develop and sustain a flexible force that can operate across the entire spectrum of conflict. This versatility relies significantly on the capacity of small units and their leaders. If the Marine Corps is to maximize the potential of its "Strategic Corporals," a holistic training and education continuum must be designed and implemented to support their development. In order to overhaul the existing training and education continuum, the critical capabilities of a Strategic Corporal, are identified through an abbreviated Mission Essential Task List process. These critical capabilities provide the foundation on which to structure a precise and balanced training and education continuum. The recommended continuum for the Strategic Corporal needs to be of a systemic design along three avenues: training, education, and professional development. Training establishes the technique, procedure and battle drill proficiency demanded in an infantry squad. Education develops the NCO's capability as an adaptive, creative problem solver who appreciates the operating environment and can be relied upon to apply sound judgment. Professional development is a classification for the remaining intangible skills required by a Strategic Corporal, occupying a position between academic education and military training. Emphasis in this category is guided by relevance to the small unit leader and includes the study of ethics, leadership, and current events.

Conclusion: The proposed continuum provides an evolutionary approach to develop leaders preparing for wars of fire and maneuver and wars of insurgency. A holistic NCO continuum integrating training, education and professional development establishes the true capacity for a Strategic Corporal to succeed and make reliable decisions in complex and chaotic environments.

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Table of Contents

	Page
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	ii
DISCLAIMER.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
PREFACE.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Thesis.....	1
THE CURRENT TRAINING AND EDUCATION CONTINUUM.....	4
The Corporal's Training and Education Continuum.....	5
ROLE OF CRITICAL CAPABILITIES.....	7
Identifying Critical Capabilities.....	10
THE AUSTRALIAN EXAMPLE.....	11
DEVELOPING THE CONTINUUM FOR THE STRATEGIC CORPORAL.....	14
Training.....	14
Education.....	16
Professional Development.....	21
CONCLUSION.....	21
ENDNOTES.....	23
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	25

Preface

After 14 years in the Marines Corps I have grown a true appreciation for the complexity of developing the capabilities of units and their leaders. During my career I have served as platoon commander for rifle, 81mm mortar, and combined anti-armor platoons, and company commander for rifle and weapons companies. I have instructed at the The Basic School and Infantry Officer Course and developed programs within Training and Education Command to train small unit leaders 'how to train'. My experience in pursuit of developing expert proficiency in both unit and individual has been enlightening. The most significant enlightenment has been with regards to Marine Non-Commissioned Officers. These young men arguably make the most difficult transition of all Marines, from follower to leader. Current institutional support for this transition is inadequate and demands immediate attention. It is for the Non-Commissioned Officer, shouldering a tremendous load for the Marine Corps and our country, that this effort is pursued.

INTRODUCTION

The United States Marine Corps is obligated to develop and sustain a flexible force that can operate across the entire spectrum of conflict. This versatility relies significantly on the capacity of small units and their leaders. Preparing small unit leaders for this complex, dynamic environment is an institutional challenge that has not been adequately advanced. This is a considerable oversight as the demands and expectations placed on small unit leaders continue to expand in the current operating environment, the Global War on Terror and in future concepts such as Distributed Operations. If the Marine Corps is to maximize the potential of its "Strategic Corporals," a holistic training and education continuum must be designed and implemented to support their development. A systemic training and education continuum for the NCO will produce a technically and procedurally proficient leader with the inherent ability to apply desired judgment in decision making, thus achieving the consistent capability of a "strategic corporal."

There is an abundance of periodicals recommending transformational change throughout the armed forces in preparation for the "Long War" and future conflict. It is no surprise that wars of insurgency are a common thread throughout these pieces and fuel much of the transformational debate. Of the transformational proposals from both inside and outside the Department of Defense, most focus on concepts associated with force structure, overall capability, and technology, while little attention has been dedicated to the individual servicemen who will continue to play the most vital role. In reality, as the likelihood of limited, asymmetric or irregular war increases so does the role of the infantryman. This role increase is evident in today's Global War on Terror (GWOT) in which the light infantry shoulders the majority of the

operational load. GWOT has exposed the challenges endured by ground forces required to operate across the entire spectrum of conflict during relatively short deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. As identified in the Marine Corps Operating Concepts for a Changing Security Environment, “the challenge today is to remain capable of beating an opponent using traditional methods while simultaneously enhancing our ability to overcome irregular, catastrophic, and disruptive methods.”¹. This is an extraordinary endeavor if taken in its entirety; however, an obvious starting point exists for the infantry at the small unit level – the non-commissioned officer.

The scope of this study focuses on the development of the infantry non-commissioned officer (NCO). Why is the NCO an obvious starting point and why focus on him? The NCOs are the first echelon of leadership in an infantry unit, they are responsible for the smallest units employed or maneuvered independently on the battlefield, and they will be in contact with the enemy regardless of the type of conflict in which ground forces are employed. As this study is written, Marine NCOs are operating in combat zones, impacting operational success and making decisions that may have strategic and political implications. So why focus on the NCO? His development may be the single greatest priority in the Marine Corps.

Acknowledging the criticality of NCO development is not an original concern. In 1999 General Krulak, then Commandant of the Marine Corps, coined the term “Strategic Corporal.” This term captured the challenges to be faced by small unit leaders in a “Three Block War”: “contingencies in which Marines may be confronted by the entire spectrum of tactical challenges in the span of a few hours and within the space of three contiguous city blocks.” This definition should sound familiar as it closely resembles situations that Marines are facing in today’s

GWOT. "The Strategic Corporal is the small unit leader fighting on the increasingly hostile, lethal and chaotic battlefields."² As General Krulak stated, "Success will hinge, as it always has, on the leadership of our junior Marines and we must ensure they are prepared."³

Inferring that small unit leadership is an obvious starting point for transformation is not intended to disparage today's NCOs. NCOs continue to perform exceptionally well in the dynamic, unpredictable operations in which they recently have been employed. This exemplary performance, however, is often in spite of their institutional development. Transformation, in this effort, targets the dated NCO development process known as the Training and Education Continuum. In actuality, the urgency of this transformation continues to escalate as the Marine Corps and the United States place increased demands on small units and their leaders. Actions to date, associated with this transformation, are surprisingly limited considering the Marine Corps released publications advising otherwise.

The 2007 edition of the *"Marine Corps Operating Concepts for a Changing Security Environment"*, in describing how Marine Corps forces must be organized, based, trained, and equipped,"⁴ emphasizes small unit leader development. "Small-unit leaders will be forced into a dynamic environment for which they must have the skills and autonomy to make decisions on their own. Key capability development tasks are to develop the training, education and personnel policies that will produce small-unit leaders more capable of thriving in a complex and often chaotic operational environment, to the point that they can capitalize on that complexity and chaos to the adversary's detriment. This is not a future issue anymore, the issue has arrived and the "capability development tasks" are here."⁵

THE CURRENT TRAINING AND EDUCATION CONTINUUM

Before overhauling the institutional development of the NCO, it is important for one to have some familiarity with the existing training and education process. In the Marine Corps, Training and Education Command (TECOM) is responsible for individual, institutional training. TECOM's mission is to develop, coordinate, resource, execute, and evaluate training and education concepts, policies, plans, and programs to ensure Marines are prepared to meet the challenges of present and future operational environments. This mission obligates TECOM to design, develop and sustain suitable training and education for Marines of all grades.

Training occurs primarily in formal schools, based on Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) Roadmaps that outline training and education requirements by MOS and grade. Roadmaps are critical components of the Training and Education Continuum as they outline institutional requirements that an individual must achieve in order to advance. This continuum applies to every Marine and is designed to maintain a balance of education and training throughout his career.

The T&E Continuum: Provides a template for a systematic review of all individual and unit T&E initiatives, including entry-level training (such as military occupational specialty (MOS), schools), skill progression training, common skills training, unit training, professional development and PME (Professional Military Education).⁶

Applying the terms education and training synonymously is a common but significant mistake. Marine Corps Order (MCO) 1553.1B, *The Training and Education System*, provides the following definitions: "Training is the conduct of instruction, discipline, or drill; the building in of information and procedures and the progressive repetition of tasks - the product of which is skill development and proficiency. Education is the process of moral and mental development; the drawing out of students to initiate the learning process and bring their own interpretations

and energies to bear - the product of which is a creative mind.”⁷ Concurrently MCO 1553.4B, Professional Military Education, defines education as “the process by which knowledge is attained in order to develop analytical skills and critical thinking capability to enable Marines to adapt quickly in any environment.”⁸ For purposes of this effort, the MCO 1553.1B definition of training and the MCO 1553.4B definition of education will be utilized.

THE CORPORAL’S TRAINING AND EDUCATION CONTINUUM

An infantry corporal receives limited institutional training and negligible education. An Infantry NCO’s career begins with Entry Level Training received at Boot Camp and at the School of Infantry. Entry Level Training is intended to develop a basic infantryman and provides the skill foundation for Marines prior to assignment to their first unit. An infantryman is exposed to an extensive list of tasks or skills during Entry Level Training from drill, customs and courtesies and physical fitness to rifleman techniques and procedures, such as marksmanship, tactical movement, and land navigation. Entry Level Training develops more than skill proficiency; it instills the distinctive Marine character. This character is the intangible quality on which Marines have relied for generations, exuding confidence, aggressiveness and relentless determination. This character, inculcated during Entry Level Training, remains vital to sustaining the reputation of the Marine Corps.

The next institutional event in the infantry NCO Roadmap is Primary Level Training. This includes, based on a combination of billet and rank, opportunities to attend Corporals Course, Sergeants Course, or the Infantry Squad Leaders Course. The Corporals Course “is focused on providing the skills necessary to lead Marines and is designed to provide the warfighting skills, core values and mindset necessary for effective leadership of a team and

subordinate Marines.”⁹ The Sergeants Course is the follow-on to Corporals Course and is intended to prepare Sergeants for increased leadership responsibilities. While the Corporal and Sergeant Courses rely on drill and ceremonies, inspections, counseling and administration to develop the NCOs, the Infantry Squad Leaders Course is a tactical leader’s course emphasizing techniques, procedures, battle-drills and combat leadership. Although squad leaders by doctrinal Tables of Organization are sergeants, in reality these key billets are often filled by corporals and senior lance corporals who are authorized to attend the Squad Leaders Course. Opportunities to attend these courses, however, are sporadic as the only requirement for promotion is completion of the Corporal and Sergeant Courses. Since the Infantry Squad Leaders Course is not required and the other courses provide minimal warfighting instruction, squad leaders deploying to combat zones often have no institutional training beyond Entry Level Training. Institutional NCO development would address this issue.

Education requirements are even less impressive in the NCO Continuum. No Professional Military Education (PME) requirements exist until the rank of Lance Corporal. Lance Corporals have to complete a distant education course from the Marine Corps Institute (MCI) titled *Leading Marines*: “designed to connect Marines with training and education while exposing them to leadership and mentoring from an operational and training perspective to prepare them for their role as future leaders within the enlisted rank structure.”¹⁰ Once a Marine completes *Leading Marines* he does not have an institutional PME requirement until the rank of Sergeant. All ranks, however, are encouraged to participate in the Marine Corps Professional Reading Program and pursue self-study.

The summation of NCO training and education continuum exposes an obvious deficiency. The minimum requirements for a corporal squad leader, fulfilling the critical role as Strategic Corporal, consist of Entry Level Training and a distant education course on leading Marines. Although additional institutional training opportunities exist, they tend to be products of timing, command priorities and some degree of luck. In order to overhaul the existing training and education continuum, the critical capabilities of a squad leader, or Strategic Corporal, must be analyzed. Critical Capabilities include the skills and abilities that a Strategic Corporal must have.

ROLE OF CRITICAL CAPABILITIES

Exemplary small unit leadership is a hallmark of the Marine Corps, and great pride is taken in the history of extraordinary small unit achievements. NCO performance in the current operating environment continues this legacy as autonomous operations by junior enlisted leaders are commonplace and NCO performance continues to exceed expectations. Institutionally, credit must be given to the character development that occurs during entry-level training, and there is certainly no intention to change that character. The intention is to arm NCOs with the tools that better equip them to employ, manipulate and benefit from the indomitable Marine character. According to General Krulak, "While a visceral appreciation for our core values is essential, it alone will not ensure an individual's success in battle or in the myriad potential contingencies short of combat. Much, much more is required to fully prepare a Marine for the rigor of tomorrow's battlefield."¹¹ As the complexity of the battlefield increases, it is the holistic development of the NCO that will determine success.

Task overload is a degrading trend in today's NCO training that results from several factors. With every new lesson, directive, threat and piece of equipment or technology comes an additional training requirement. As capability requirements increase in the operating environment so do the capability expectations of small units and NCOs. Compounding this issue is the complexity of the threat. Marines are expected to prepare for contingencies that span the spectrum of conflict. While it seems logical that the capabilities of NCOs expand as lessons and operational demands reveal deficiencies, the unfortunate reality is that increased expectations without adequate resources and training opportunities detract from the critical capabilities of NCOs and is a detriment to their competence. Consequences of task overload, therefore, are the reduced proficiency of NCOs and small units in critical skills. In the world of limited time and resources, it is impossible to become good at everything.

As described, training requirements are continually added to the NCO's continuum. Unfortunately, these additions are rarely complemented by the reduction of unnecessary, or less critical, existing requirements. There is no disputing the necessity for evolving training requirements, with lessons from the operating environment, changes in technology and equipment, updated tactics, techniques and procedures, and the enemy all requiring constant monitoring. This process of change, however, must be deliberate and balanced. The challenge is determining and updating the critical or core capabilities, which will be referred to as tasks. Although the effects of task overload impact Marines throughout their careers, for purposes of this project, assumptions will be made regarding entry level training in order to sustain the NCO focus.

Determining the tasks to be taught in Marine Corps formal schools began as a fairly

common sense process; however, the past two decades have seen a substantial increase in the capacity expectations of an infantry NCO. Until Desert Storm, the number of technical and procedural tasks associated with an infantry squad and NCO remained fairly limited. Desert Storm initiated an expansion of the complexity of the infantryman's skill set: a rapid influx of technology, optics and weapons, adoption of maneuver warfare, and an era of continuous technological developments. These skill sets and associated task list continue to expand with the current operating environment, the technical demands associated with technology, and employment in a genuine "three-block war." Further additions to this task list are likely to result from concepts such as Distributed Operations and the Marine Corps' enduring obligation to remain prepared for the entire spectrum of conflict. It should be apparent that the determination of critical capabilities provides the foundation on which to structure a precise and balanced training and education continuum.

When a threat or limited number of threats can be specified, training, equipping and education is simple. Conversely, when the threat is as substantial yet as vague as it is today, it becomes increasingly difficult to isolate requirements and determine critical capabilities. This is the ultimate challenge facing the Commandant of the Marine Corps with his responsibility for training, manning and equipping the force. General Conway directed, "Planning and preparedness in the Long War requires a talented, multi-dimensional force that is well trained and educated for employment in all forms of warfare; adaptability is a core competency and remains a trademark of our Corps."¹²

General Conway's vision alludes to substantial capability requirements as the Marine Corps remains the country's rapid response force. The capability to respond to crisis in all forms

of warfare necessitates an expertly trained force. Marines cannot depend on an allocation of time to prepare for a specific conflict prior to employment; they will have to rely on achieved expertise in critical capabilities. The NCO's role does not change; he will most likely be leading a small unit at the point of contact regardless of the type of conflict. Therefore it is the NCO's proficiency and expertise that most directly impacts the Marine Corps capacity to achieve the Commandant's vision. It is the proficiency of the NCO in carefully selected critical capabilities that will enable small units to sustain their history of excellence.

IDENTIFYING CRITICAL CAPABILITIES

The problems and potential for task overload have been examined and the necessity for developing a comprehensive list of NCO critical capabilities explained. Now the challenge is determining the critical capabilities. Fortunately, an existing process can support the effort. Commanders, at company level and above, utilize a tool within the Unit Training Management Program titled the Mission Essential Task List (METL). The METL is designed to "identify what the unit must do to accomplish its wartime mission and focus training on essential tasks. This process evolved out of the recognition that units cannot achieve and sustain proficiency on every possible task. Therefore, we identify the things a unit must do to accomplish its wartime mission, then, focus our training on these essential tasks."¹³ The benefits of deliberate METL development are cohesive subordinate training plans, achievable training requirements and the elimination, or at least reduction, of superfluous training.

Without this disciplined process, unit training becomes inefficient and inconsistent. This process is essential to units preparing to deploy to combat and the same process should be applied to institutional training. The formal schools infrastructure within the Marine Corps

needs to conduct its own METL analysis for every billet and Military Occupational Specialty. The reactionary, knee jerk response to recent training requirements reflects indecisiveness and inconsistency by decision makers within the Marines Corps and Training and Education Command. This accusation is only partially justified as the process used to develop and sustain institutional training is suspect. The process is outlined in the Systems Approach to Training (SAT) Manual “developed to support Marine Corps training/education policy and Department of Defense (DOD) military training program requirements. This Manual serves as a primary source of information and guidance, mainly for use by the formal school/training centers' instructional staff, for instructional program development and management.”¹⁴ The SAT has proven ineffective in generating recent institutional renovation in the infantry formal schools. Fortunately, despite the SAT process, the initiative of Marine instructors at institutional schools managed to overcome substantial training deficiencies. Although aspects of the process outlined in the SAT may remain valid, until it is overhauled in application, it will remain inefficient. It is for these reasons that the SAT process is discounted in this effort.

THE AUSTRALIAN EXAMPLE

The Australian Army, consisting of just over 26,000 soldiers, has a similar ethos to that of the United States Marine Corps, to include a small unit operating culture. Predictably, the Australian Army faces many of the same current and transformational challenges. One of the concepts that the Australian Army has embraced is that of the Strategic Corporal. In October 2002, Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, Chief of the Australian Army was quoted, “The era of the strategic corporal is here. The soldier of today must possess the professional mastery of warfare,

but match this with political and media sensitivity.”¹⁵ Although the Australians are grappling with future NCO training and education requirements just as the United States Marines are, the existing Australian continuum is quite effective, providing an impressive foundation.

Surprisingly, the Australians employ a “Defense Training Model”¹⁶ very similar in design to the USMC Systems Approach to Training. In application, however, the Australian model is considerably more efficient. This efficiency is gained through their capability focus that manages and integrates capabilities from “conception to disposal.”¹⁷ Through the application of the “Army Continuous Modernization Plan, capability requirements are identified along with the development of associated training, competency standards and doctrine.”¹⁸ This plan facilitates a focused training architecture that “clearly articulates relevant training objectives and enables them (soldiers) to develop professional mastery and fighting power.”¹⁹

The “whole-of-career learning”²⁰ approach, similar to the USMC training and education continuum, consists of training, education and professional development. Australian training doctrine often refers to these as “competency-based training, capability-building education and professional development.”²¹ All aspects of Australian soldier and unit development emphasize professional mastery with “clear emphasis on the analysis and evaluation of training as the primary means of determining whether the training conducted meets current operational requirements, and whether the quality of training is adequate and solves performance problems.”²² The persistent connectivity between proficiency and operational requirements keeps the Australian training and education process focused on critical capabilities. This focus is evident throughout the development continuum of the Australian Army NCO.

In contrast to a Marine Corporal, Australian Corporals endure a comprehensive

development process. A combination of Subject One and Subject Two Courses make up the soldiers training and education continuum. Subject One Courses are Military Occupational Specialty courses, executed by operational units and standardized by the Australian Training Command. Subject Two Courses are considered 'all corps', comparable to USMC Corporal and Sergeant Course, and are conducted institutionally by the Australian Training and Education Command. A substantial difference between USMC and Australian 'all corps' courses is the use of warfighting common skills to develop NCOs. Australians utilize patrolling as a common combat skill from which to develop leadership, establish a warfighting foundation and reinforce confidence. Considering the extensive combat skills and tasks associated with patrolling, the effort has better prepared the Australian Army for the realities of modern conflict. Every NCO trained as a provisional war-fighter provides a substantial capability.

An additional aspect of Australian training, education and professional development that elevates effectiveness is an emphasis on demonstrated proficiency. Australian training and education doctrine emphasizes all aspects of development that contribute to achieving professional mastery: i.e. understanding learning and teaching methods, evaluation, maintenance of standards, instructor education, and remediation. The Australians' "competency-based training and assessment is an approach to learning which places primary emphasis on what the learner can 'do.' Competency-based programs focus on training in the specific job competencies with clear assessment of achievement."²³ The Australian emphasis on mastering select skills has produced a truly professional and impressive NCO corps, evident in their recent performances in Afghanistan and East Timor.

DEVELOPING THE CONTINUUM FOR THE STRATEGIC CORPORAL

The recommended continuum for the Strategic Corporal needs to be a systemic process along three lines of development. These lines of development reflect those in the Australian continuum: training, education, and professional development. Training and education although considerably enhanced in scope will coincide with the definitions provided in the MCO 1553.4B. Professional development as evidenced in the Australian example provides a wonderful classification for the intangible skills that are critical to developing a true Strategic Corporal. Professional development, as defined by the Australian Army, "is related to the growth of the individual without reference to the specific job."²⁴

The proposed continuum is based on a fairly simple premise: A corporal with a squad of trained Marines can be put into almost any situation and if he has mastered critical combat skills, received appropriate education on the environment in which employed, and developed judgment in problem solving and decision making, is likely to excel. This premise represents a situation that squads, led by NCOs, frequently experience.

TRAINING

Establishing the training requirements for an infantry NCO is a fairly intuitive process. These training requirements, or tasks, are the critical technique, procedure and battle drill capabilities that a corporal must have. They represent the most common tasks that small units execute across the spectrum of conflict. Though additional tasks can certainly be added, small unit leaders who achieve high levels of proficiency in the recommended tasks will profit from a

tremendous foundation. A consideration that did contribute to the selection of critical tasks was the obligation to prepare for the 'worst case.'

By visualizing a realistic 'worst case' scenario that a small unit and small unit leader may find itself, further critical capabilities were deduced. Although extreme situations could certainly be imagined, the 'worst case' for this effort is an isolated squad engaged in urban close combat with civilians in near proximity. From this situation a simplified METL process assisted in identifying critical leader capabilities. The squad leader has to employ organic weapons and optics, conduct fire and movement and/or fire and maneuver, defend, communicate, coordinate with adjacent units, employ fire support, treat and evacuate casualties and discriminate between targets. It is not as simple as shoot, move and communicate but it certainly resembles this mantra. The number of tasks deduced from the common methods of small unit employment and the 'worst case' scenario are significant but achievable.

RECOMMENDED TRAINING TASKS:

1. Employ all organic weapons within the Squad
2. Conduct land navigation
3. Lead a squad in formations and movement
4. Lead a squad in the attack of a fortified position
5. Lead a squad in the attack of a building
6. Lead a squad in a reconnaissance patrol
7. Lead a squad in Combat Patrol
8. Conduct a CASEVAC
9. Write and issue an operation order
10. Conduct a call for fire using the Polar, Grid, and Shift from a Known Point method
11. Employ Close Air Support
12. Conduct communications with VHF, UHF, and SATCOM radios
13. Coordinate with higher and adjacent units
14. Conduct a Link-Up
15. Collect Information

There are several factors that must be considered when examining the tasks in isolation. First, the list provided is a continuation of tasks that an NCO must have previously mastered as a fire team leader. Secondly, a task is defined by the associated standard; therefore, the quality of the task standard reflects the capability when a task is executed properly. The third factor relates to proficiency. Proficiency is a critical aspect in the NCO continuum as it defines 'how well' an individual must be able to execute a particular task. For its significance, proficiency will be addressed separately.

A substantial result of achieving enhanced proficiency in the outlined tasks is the precious quality, confidence. It is difficult to instill the type of confidence that results from kinetic competence. Marines who recognize their ability to defeat the 'worst case' are often more willing to engage and accept unusual problems. This confidence and comfort in unpredictable situations is a Strategic Corporal necessity.

EDUCATION

As previously identified, education is the most critical gap in current NCO development and requires the most radical change. Although his kinetic capabilities are important, his ability to employ and lead his unit in various environments while making difficult decisions is most critical. Professional education is intended to "develop analytical skills and critical thinking capability to enable Marines to adapt quickly in any environment."²⁵ For a Strategic Corporal to achieve this adaptability he must be able to apply sound judgment in decision-making, solve complex problems, develop unit proficiency, and appreciate the environment in which employed.

Through education the capacity to assess situations and make informed decisions can be developed. System Theory and systems thinking provide an enlightened perspective from which to base this capability. This method of thinking facilitates a more realistic approach to problem solving and decision making in interactively complex environments. As Clausewitz explains, “war is an interactive process”²⁶ and “the very nature of interaction is bound to make it unpredictable.”²⁷ Marine small unit leaders challenged by complex interactions must be adaptive, creative problem solvers with sound judgment.

In the Marine Corps’ capstone doctrinal publication, *Warfighting*, systems thinking is emphasized. “We should try to understand the unique characteristics that make the enemy system function so that we can penetrate the system, tear it apart, and, if necessary, destroy the isolated components.”²⁸ Understanding the enemy system is a significant task, especially for small unit leaders in time constrained, complex and sometimes isolated situations. The situation described, to the small unit leader, is his ‘wicked problem.’

Warfighting emphasizes, “We must be prepared to thrive in an environment of chaos, uncertainty, constant change, and friction.”²⁹ To thrive necessitates leaders at every level to examine and appreciate the enemy system and to diagnose difficult problems. Developing this capability at the small unit level requires education on Systems Theory and systems thinking. This education is an institutional obligation and should be integrated into the leaders’ course curriculums throughout the Marine Corps. Through a scaled comprehensive education continuum, Systems Theory and systems thinking will become common leader skills. For the small unit leader, systems thinking becomes an enabler for understanding the enemy, as highlighted in *Warfighting*, and a tool for framing relatively complex problems. Though a

leader's appreciation for a problem is absolutely essential so is that leader's decisions and actions taken to engage the problem.

Numerous studies have engaged decision-making capacity; Gary Klein conducted one of the most functional. His research outlined the factors that impact decision-making in high-stress, time-sensitive environments, actual methods used by professionals and issues that might lead to poor decisions. Throughout Klein's research, experience and judgment are highlighted as enablers to good decisions. "Experience is needed to make a variety of judgments, ranging from identifying opportunities to gauging the solvability of a problem."³⁰ These are obvious capabilities desired in Marine leaders; however, further understanding of decision-making is required. Klein also explains the differences between amateurs and experts.

The division between amateur and expert small unit leader is the barrier that must be breached. "Experts see inside events and objects. They have mental models of how tasks are supposed to be performed, teams are supposed to coordinate, equipment is supposed to function."³¹ Klein describes the experts' ability, among others, "to see: Patterns that novices do not notice, the big picture, the way things work, opportunities or improvisations, the past and future, and their own limitations."³² The desire and demand for these expert capabilities in small unit leaders is obvious. Unfortunately, further barriers are driven between expert and novice as a result of experience.

According to Klein's research, the partially trained small unit leader is inadequately prepared for 'wicked problems.' "Data shows that experienced decision makers adapt to time pressure very well by focusing on the most relevant cues and ignoring the others, and in order to define problems and generate novel courses of action, they need to draw on experience to make

judgments.”³³ For Marines, even those who dedicate an entire career, spend only a fraction, if any, of that time in combat. Experience, therefore, must be imparted through other means.

Based on Klein’s research, “There are two primary sources of power for individual decision making and problem solving: Pattern matching (the power of intuition), and mental simulation.”³⁴ Pattern matching or “intuition, depends on the use of experience to recognize key patterns that indicate the dynamics of the situation,”³⁵ while “mental simulation is the process of building a sequence of snapshots to play out and to observe what occurs, in a particular situation.”³⁶ It is within these two ‘sources of power’ that small unit leader capabilities must be developed. Additionally, it is the methods associated with pattern matching and mental simulation that links decision-making to systems’ thinking.

So the challenge remains to develop experience in small unit leaders beyond on the job training. Fortunately, according to Klein, “the part of intuition that involves pattern matching and recognition of familiar and typical cases can be trained. If you want people to size up situations quickly and accurately, you need to expand their experience base.”³⁷ This experience base can be developed through “a training program, perhaps with exercises and realistic scenarios, so the person has a chance to size up numerous situations very quickly. These exercises or scenarios may include simulations as they can sometimes provide more training value than direct experience.”³⁸ These excerpts from Klein’s training suggestions reveal a set of simple principles: variety and repetition.

These principles are not revolutionary. At the time Klein’s book was written, “Marines were beginning to use rapid pattern-matching exercises, emphasizing pattern matching over the formal analysis of alternate options.”³⁹ Although this methodology was experimented with in the

Marine Corps through the Combat Decision Range, its application has since lost momentum. The unfortunate impact of personality within the training and education institution has prevented continuity in the development of effective decision-making training. Until systems thinking, reliable decision making and sound judgment are common versus extraordinary skills amongst our small unit leaders, their capacity will be limited.

Remaining topics for Strategic Corporal education are small unit development and cultural training. The training capability of the small unit leader is critical to creating adaptive, sufficient small units. Of the training methodologies coaching is the most essential. It is the most efficient and effective method to develop proficiency, trust and mutual respect. Additionally, coaching provides a forum for small unit leaders to lead by example while developing patience and confidence. Although the discipline and obedience to orders instilled through boot camp style training has its place, it is not conducive to achieving the levels of proficiency and self-confidence required in Marines and small units. Coaching is a skill that demands dedicated, tiered education augmented by practical application.

The definition of education exposed the demand for flexibility. For leaders to adapt quickly to an environment, some familiarity with that environment is required. Cultural training has proven essential in developing this capability. Throughout the GWOT, cultural training has demonstrated its relevance to conflict, not only in wars of fire and maneuver but also in wars of insurgency. Cultural training is a subject that should permeate small unit leader education in formal schools and requisite PME.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As described in the *Australian Army Journal*, “professional development occupies a position between academic education and military training. Education in topics such as military law and leadership, military history, current affairs and ethics should be considered as part of professional development studies. Such studies should be aimed at providing knowledge that is direct value to soldiers in the execution of their duties. Most soldiers do not require in-depth academic education in subjects such as military history or international relations. Rather, they require a basic applied knowledge of these subjects alongside a ‘lessons learnt’ approach that assists in soldierly decision –making and judgment.”⁴⁰

Professional development provides a category in which to integrate all those ‘other’ skills that leaders need. It is not appropriate to simply add these capabilities to education, as they demand unique attention. The Australian Army places these topics somewhere between education and training, averting confusion and providing an outlet for extraordinary subjects. Emphasis in this category of development must be guided by relevance to the small unit leader. At a minimum, it should include the study of ethics, leadership, and current events. These three topics will significantly enhance that small unit leader’s application of judgment.

CONCLUSION

“Failures in innovation are often attributed to misuses of history and rigidity.”⁴¹ This effort is intended to avoid such failures. Though the proposed continuum is a result of reason, analysis of the existing continuum, and the current operating environment, it is the holistic approach to leader development that is evolutionary. The Marine Corps’ expectation of the

small unit leader must be captured in critical capabilities and supported by a comprehensive training and education continuum. Until the difficult decisions are made regarding what is 'critical', the NCO will continue to suffer from task overload. The current operating environment can not be the single cause for updating the existing continuum.

Gen Krulak emphasized the criticality of judgment in small unit leaders when he labeled the Strategic Corporal. Whether small unit leaders are employed in wars of fire and maneuver or wars of insurgency, their success in these complex and chaotic environments depends on proficiency and judgment. Until a holistic training, education and professional development continuum is designed and implemented, NCO capabilities, and therefore the Strategic Corporal, will remain inconsistent.

¹ U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Operating Concepts for a Changing Security Environment*. Second Edition June 2007, pg 31

² Krulak, General Charles C., "The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War" *Marines Magazine*, January 1999.

³ Krulak, General Charles C., "The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War" *Marines Magazine*, January 1999.

⁴ U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Operating Concepts for a Changing Security Environment*. Second Edition June 2007, pg xvii.

⁵ U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Operating Concepts for a Changing Security Environment*. Second Edition June 2007, pg 66.

⁶ United States Marine Corps, Training and Education Command Website, www.tecom.usmc.mil.

⁷ Marine Corps Order 1553.1B, The Marine Corps Training and Education System, 24 May 1991, P 1.

⁸ Marine Corps Order 1553.4B, Professional Military Education, 25 Jan 2008. P 1.

⁹ MCO 1553.4B. 25 Jan 2008. P 2-7.

¹⁰ MCO 1553.4B. 25 Jan 2008. P 2-7.

¹¹ Krulak, General Charles C., "The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War" *Marines Magazine*, January 1999.

¹² Marine Corps Operating Concept for a Changing Security Environment. Second Edition June 2007, pg viii & xiii.

¹³ U.S. Marine Corps. How to Conduct Training: Marine Corps Reference Publication 3-0B. 1996. P 1-2, 1-3.

¹⁴ U.S. Marine Corps, Systems Approach to Training Manual: Marine Corps Reference Publication, 2004, P i.

¹⁵ Defense Management Seminar (Strategic and International Policy Division) Canberra, Australia, 18 Oct 2002.

¹⁶ Australian Army, Land Warfare Doctrine (LWD) 7-2, Collective Training, 2004, p 1-7.

¹⁷ Australian Army, Land Warfare Doctrine (LWD) 7-1, Individual Training, 2004, p 5-13.

¹⁸ LWD 7-1, p 5-15.

¹⁹ LWD 7-2, p 1-2.

²⁰ LWD 7-1, p 6-3.

²¹ LWD 7-1, p 4-23.

²² LWD 7-1, p 5-23.

²³ LWD 7-1, p 5-5.

²⁴ Smith, H., Preparing Future Leaders, The Education of Future Military Leaders, American Society for Training and Development study, 1997, p 2.

²⁵ MCO 1553.4B. 25 Jan 2008. P 1.

²⁶ Beyerchen, Alan, "Clausewitz, Nonlinearity, and the Unpredictability of War," *International Security* (Winter 1992/3): 16.

²⁷ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. And trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 139.

²⁸ U.S. Marine Corps, *Warfighting: MCDP-1*, 1997, 77.

²⁹ MCDP-1, 80.

³⁰ Klein, Gary, *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions*, Cambridge, Massachusetts. The MIT Press. 1999,146.

³¹ Klein, 152.

³² Klein, 149.

³³ Klein, 141.

³⁴ Klein, 142.

³⁵ Klein, 31.

³⁶ Klein, 45.

³⁷ Klein, 42.

³⁸ Klein, 43

³⁹ Klein, 44.

⁴⁰ Liddy, Major Lynda. *The Strategic Corporal: Some Requirements in Training and Education*. Australian Army Journal, Vol II, Number 2. P142

⁴¹ Murray, Williamson & Millet, Allan. *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*. Cambridge University Press. Pgs 318-325

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