Developing Joint Force Officer-Enlisted Leadership Capacity for the 21st Century

By CURTIS L. BROWNHILL

As a part of my efforts to assist the Chairman in moving the joint force toward where we need to be in 2020, I have seen the need to improve the quality of joint training and education for our enlisted leaders as they increasingly find themselves confronting the problem of operating in joint formations and staffs around the globe. While their Service training and education have prepared these leaders for their tactical missions, their training and education in joint operations have yet to meet the same standard. Chief Brownhill expresses many of the concerns I have heard from enlisted leaders in my travels as the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman (SEAC). I am certain that the Chairman and I will continue to seek the best possible joint training and education opportunities for the entire enlisted force as we adapt the entire joint force to meet the challenges ahead.

—Sergeant Major Brian B. Battaglia, USMC, SEAC

Across the globe, our all-volunteer joint force remains fully engaged in operations to keep our homeland secure, defeat global enemies, set conditions for global stability, and establish and maintain long-term multinational security partnerships. This remarkable joint force, led by a professional officer and senior enlisted leader corps, continues a legacy of greatness.

Our military is a learning organization, and advancements in joint capability have matured over the 26 years since passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. However, the U.S. Government has yet to realize the act's *full* potential due to an institutional underinvestment in the joint development of its professional enlisted corps. "Just in time" training is both operationally shortsighted and professionally inadequate. To reach full capacity, the Department of Defense (DOD) must institute a comprehensive joint enlisted development concept that is commensurate with what our enlisted force is already doing (validated throughout a decade of war). It needs to begin early in a military career and be proportionate to predetermined levels.

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Why Joint Enlisted Education Is Needed

The 21st-century joint operating environment (JOE) is complex and can be generally characterized as a globalized, demographically emergent world with interdependent economies; shared and competing interests of developed and developing states; unpredictable failed states, rogue states, and nonstate actors; and ideologically based international terrorist networks fueled by dangerous historical animosities enhanced by technology.

The dynamic nature of the JOE is the new normal. For the U.S. Government and the Armed Forces, the scope and duration of current and future operations and missions will require tremendous flexibility and the ability to adjust to meet global threats. Clearly, given the magnitude of our strategic objectives, our enlisted leaders, alongside our officers, will be called upon to meet these challenges. We should anticipate more responsibilities to be placed on the shoulders of our noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and petty officers. This new and enduring environment will demand adequate educational preparation for all military leaders.

The JOE will shape our military doctrine and resultant Service force structures based on the strategic ways, means, and ends as determined by each combatant commander. Additionally, an interdependent joint force will require a well-trained joint battle staff in which NCOs and petty officers can and should play an increasing role. In any given operational area, our military leaders are immersed with U.S. interagency partners and allies in building long-term security cooperation partnerships (Phase 0 shaping). The JOE also demands the ability to integrate the efforts of DOD civilians, contractors, and international nongovernmental organizations.

Command Team Relationship

The cornerstone of the Armed Forces professional military model and the emulation of many a nation is our commitment to the strong and proven officer-enlisted leadership relationship resident within each Service. This unique capacity is a direct result of a lineage of honor and service, as well as nearly four decades of collective and determined professionalization of the all-volunteer force. Furthermore, the evolution of the NCO and petty officer from the traditional support leadership (what to do) role to one of empowerment and responsibility (how to think) role is matched only by the unquestioned trust and confidence placed in them by the officers of their respective Services. Today, NCOs and petty officers, regardless of Service, not only enhance the chain of command but are also responsible for a strong chain of communication in a far more complex environment than in the past.

At the root of the U.S. military officer-enlisted leadership relationship is the foundational concept of unity of command based on trust and confidence and grounded in mission accomplishment. This critical reality ensures continuity of mission and authority as an essential element of U.S. military doctrine and is intrinsic to each Service's core competencies and creeds. In essence, the battle will continue in the absence of the officer. For U.S. military NCOs and petty officers, this is a well-defined concept that ensures unit integrity, discipline, and overall effectiveness. Our NCOs are professionally developed to reach this standard. Difficulties arise, however, when proven officer-enlisted leadership relationships, time-tested unity of command, and communication qualities, seemingly easy to execute within their respective Services, must expand (often rather quickly) for leadership in joint and coalition organizations.

Goldwater-Nichols—The Next Step

Goldwater-Nichols was not an endstate in itself but an important first step in the direction of a fully integrated joint force. As a first step, it was not focused on expanding the joint aspect of the enlisted corps. Rather, it was principally focused on defining the combatant command lines of authority, improving joint operations and planning, and developing

officers capable of leading joint forces in the future. The drafters of the law may well have included a joint enlisted development focus had they been able to predict the second- and third-order effects of a quarter-century of collective joint development of our officers (by law) and over three decades applied to the professional evolution of the enlisted corps.

Goldwater-Nichols redirected a Service-centric military to become joint in planning and execution of operations, as well as developing officers from each Service educated in the reality of joint operations. As a result, the majority of our nation's military officers are steeped in joint doctrine and well prepared to lead in a joint-combined operational environment. However, while our officers (company grade, field grade, and senior) continue to depend heavily on their enlisted leaders to complement and enable them to be comprehensively effective, their enlisted leaders have not been adequately prepared for the same environment.

The operational analysis of the past 10 years reveals that the joint professional enlisted corps, specifically midgrade and senior enlisted leaders, complements the officer joint competencies of strategic-mindedness, critical thinking, skilled joint warfighting, process development, and planning in the tactical and operational battlespace and on joint force staffs. And they do that with little-to-no formal joint development opportunities. Complementing is fine, but enabling should be the goal.

A recognized term—the *strategic corporal*—is a means of illustrating that the tactical decisions made by Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Coastguardsmen may indeed have strategic impacts. It is a realistic term that can be applied to all grades and levels, but it fails to acknowledge two key issues:

- If a corporal's actions could have either a positive or negative strategic effect, then how was the corporal developed for the task he was given?
- When a corporal looks up from a difficult or complex task for guidance, purpose, and strength, it is the NCO or petty officer he sees first.

These are important considerations. The NCO or petty officer could reasonably be termed the *operational staff sergeant*. Thus, our critical focus really must be on the operational staff sergeant who leads the strategic corporal and is a component of the officer-enlisted leadership team.

Unfortunately, for too many enlisted leaders regardless of Service, especially senior enlisted leaders, the leap from Service-centric tactical-level focus to joint/combined/interagency operational focus and mission exposure is immense. Many simply cannot adapt and overcome the unknown and can only find comfort in their Service-laden foxhole. They are not incapable of adapting—far from it; they simply have not been provided available joint education and preparation that provides confidence in leading forces other than their own. They, like commissioned officers, must have education, training, and seasoning to a level appropriate and proportionate to the environment in which they will operate and lead.

The Way Ahead

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 1805.01, Enlisted Professional Military Education Policy, is limited as a forcing function to achieve full potential for a comprehensive joint development process for the enlisted corps. However, as a policy, it may be considered "directive enough" to accommodate the joint development of our junior and midlevel enlisted members with a proper focus. On the other hand, CJCSI 1805.01 falls well short as a policy (as opposed to a law) when addressing compelling joint development requirements of senior enlisted leaders and staff NCOs performing duties at operational and strategic level organizations.

As we work toward the necessary endstate of joint enlisted leaders, we must understand that any strategy to accomplish that should be pursued in a diligent manner that recognizes that it is essential to achieve joint capacity appropriate to the joint operational environment. We must remain aware that the strength of the joint team lies in the uniqueness of the ability of the Services to apply their capabilities at the decisive point to promote synergy of effort and accomplishment of the Nation's objectives. Furthermore, no strategy should dilute the distinction between the status of officers and enlisted members; it must instead complement it. This strategy cannot negatively affect command structure or degrade a Service's Title 10 responsibilities to organize, train, and equip forces.

Any strategy should be proportionate to the scope of each enlisted grade, keeping in mind that our young warriors, enablers, and rebuilders must remain focused on their primary military specialties. Most importantly, any strategy must strike a necessary and desirable balance between traditional Service culture and identity and the unique leadership demands resident within the joint force. The endstate of the strategy is to build upon what gives us our known strengths and capacities in order to make us even more effective for the future.

DOD should establish and adapt joint courses of study at the E-6 to E-9 grades at both Service and joint educational institutions, which provide the opportunities to grow student intellectual capacity at all levels. Such education should be accredited by civilian educational institutions and linked to advancement and consideration for selected joint duties. As an institution, DOD should feel comfortable in affording opportunities for selected enlisted leaders to attend appropriate levels of existing joint professional military education institutions traditionally reserved for junior and field-grade officers. Joint curriculum within the enlisted professional military education institutions of each Service should also be redefined and developed in ways that encourage "cross-pollination" of students on a large scale.

At a joint-minded level, we need to rethink our Service personnel systems, which could enhance the ability to ensure that our joint force commanders have the best possible considerations for critical joint-enlisted leadership and staff NCO positions in the future. While a policy would work for junior and midlevel enlisted grades, legislation might be required to ensure that our senior enlisted leaders are afforded the necessary advanced joint professional military education.

The U.S. officer-enlisted leader relationship and unity of command ethos is a cornerstone of our strength and success as a military. However, by simply sustaining it as it currently is, as opposed to advancing it to where it needs to go, we are setting the conditions for failure in meeting the leadership demands of the 21st-century joint operating environment. We require a new national vision and a broadened military culture that is consistent with this century and for this all-volunteer joint force. We need to be confident in taking the necessary bold steps in providing appropriate levels of joint development for the enlisted force to complement our joint officers and to advance the capabilities of the total joint force. **JFQ**