
Regimental Command Sergeant Major



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The Generation Gap

Happy 69th Anniversary from the Home of the Regiment! Once again, it's that time of year to reconnect with our history and renew our commitment to the team. This year's theme, "The Army's Triple Strand of Strength; Military Police Corps Regiment" (see back cover), has received very positive reviews from the field. It is a message of teamwork, communication, and pride in our profession. I want to thank all of you for embracing the premise and moving forward in the spirit of this year's theme.

As this issue comes off the press, our finest young warfighters are conducting final preparations and packing for their journeys to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. There is no doubt in my mind that they will represent their organizations extremely well, solidifying our claim that we have the finest Soldiers and leaders the Army has to offer. It is this young generation of future senior leaders that I would like to address in this issue of *Military Police*. I would like to take this opportunity to generate thought and discussion on the effects of the operational tempo (OPTEMPO) on our future leaders.



Over the past several years, our force has been actively engaged in war on two fronts. Our Soldiers and leaders have been performing remarkably well under very tough conditions and with great sacrifice. Without question, they are motivated, capable, and courageous. They have the combat skills necessary to execute independent, small-unit missions that range from assisting humanity to unleashing fury on the enemy—all at the same time. By all measures, they are talented and adaptive. However, there is a cost associated with such focus and intensity.

With time, we have developed a generation of future leaders that views standards differently than older generations. In an era in which the phrase "take a knee" is synonymous with "back in garrison" and our "roads to war" serve as lockstep training models, we have to wonder how our Soldiers and junior leaders will view traditions, standards, and training in the years to come. Some of you "old Soldiers" probably recall the culture of our post-Vietnam Army—a force that followed a decade of war. Our ranks were full of experienced combat veterans who viewed things differently than those of us who followed. I'm not saying that was a bad thing; I'm just making a correlation and implying that we might be headed down a similar path now. Let's reflect a bit.

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Remember when . . .

- . . . you spent an hour each evening preparing your uniform for the next duty day?
- . . . you took pride in your appearance—whether you were on road duty or not?
- . . . you prepared for attendance at professional development courses by stepping up your fitness game so that you would perform well on the Army physical fitness test (APFT) and meet body fat standards?
- . . . junior NCOs made on-the-spot corrections?
- . . . we were not on constant deployment cycles?
- . . . standards were not the flexible "bill payer" for OPTEMPO?
- . . . you actually developed training plans, as opposed to having them handed to you?
- . . . our leaders understood training development—not just its execution?

Although we don't like to admit it, there is an undertone throughout our ranks and within our formations. Maybe it's fatigue. Maybe it's an expanding generation gap that was created because our senior leaders have been so focused downrange that the training of subordinates on the basics of what makes us a professional, well-rounded force has been overlooked. Maybe it's just the environment in which we operate today. Regardless of what "it" is, a discussion is in order.

A Soldier's military appearance offers an immediate visual measure of discipline and pride. Any senior leader who has been around for awhile can, within minutes, get a good sense of a unit's discipline level by observing how the Soldiers present and carry themselves. In general, though, positive impressions achieved through appearance are no longer valued. Albeit a controversial statement, our Army combat uniform has made us lazy. While the Army combat uniform is utilitarian and the associated sewing and laundering costs are minimal, the uniform has provided an excuse for individuals who lack pride in their personal appearance. Some Soldiers wear filthy boots, curled or dirty name tapes, or uniforms that look like they just came from a duffle bag. You've heard the excuses, and you know what I'm talking about. But those who fancy themselves to be "combat Soldiers" need to understand that a concern for their appearance does not make them "pretty" and it does not mean that they are "garrison Soldiers"—rather, it's a mark of pride and professionalism.

Many of our younger Soldiers and junior leaders have never been compelled to put much effort into their appearance. Most of them have not worn a Class A uniform since they went through individual entry training. The disappearance of Class A uniforms from professional development courses and traditional events such as NCO induction ceremonies, coupled with the discontinuation of Class A inspections, has contributed to the devaluation of this basic Soldier skill. We have failed to train our young Soldiers in this area; therefore, it seems unlikely that future senior leaders will train their Soldiers in this area.

Fitness has never been more important. With today's OPTEMPO and yearlong deployments, it is easy to fall out of shape. To a certain degree, this is understandable; but you do not have a blanket license to "let go." Don't allow yourself to misinterpret fitness waivers that were designed to target specific populations. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that, because you are no longer required to take an APFT, you don't need to be physically fit upon your arrival at an NCO Education System course. And leaders, don't regard changes in requirements as a license to send your unfit Soldiers to class. Flag them and enroll them in a weight control program or special-population physical training with the intent to help them succeed. I have a sense that there is confusion in the field in this area. When was the last time you saw a Soldier discharged from the Army due to a failure to meet fitness standards? When did you last see a special-population physical training program in which the leaders were required to be right there with the deficient Soldiers? Is it possible that with all the waivers that have been issued, we have trained an entire generation of leaders to believe that standards are flexible? If we don't understand and embrace the purpose of fitness requirements and don't enforce the standards on those who are capable, we teach our future leaders that the rules can be bent and that fitness is not important. It's all about value, discipline, accountability, and enforcement.

As senior leaders, we must ask ourselves if we are investing the time required to properly train the next generation of Soldiers—or if we have our heads down, moving forward to our next objective. Are we too busy operating in survival or "mission accomplishment" mode? Maybe we have outpaced ourselves.

A constant factor in these examples is time—or the lack thereof. As senior leaders, we must ask ourselves if we are investing the time required to properly train the next generation of Soldiers—or if we have our heads down, moving forward to our next objective. Are we too busy operating in survival or "mission accomplishment" mode? Maybe we have outpaced ourselves. Maybe the OPTEMPO has resulted in a "Get R Done" mentality that has led to the bypassing of the midlevel steps necessary to develop our future leaders. Can we slow down? Do we need to adapt?

Think about disciplinary actions, for example. Remember when one of your subordinates "tripped up" and, as a result, was "called to the carpet"? Remember how that was somehow your fault (even though you were on leave and in another state) because you had apparently created a climate that was conducive to bad behavior? Back then, you were upset. But I dare say that, today, you recognize the training value in holding a young leader accountable for the actions of subordinates. Back then, you counseled lower-level Soldiers and provided them with corrective training. But young leaders in the same situation today would likely stand outside and wait to be told what's going to happen; they would be expected to have little or no accountability. These days, officer and NCO evaluation reports contain long lists of achievements (winning boards, maxing APFTs), but no mention of failures to meet weight or APFT standards or the administration of "Articles 15."¹ Why aren't these negative things mentioned? Are we missing a developmental opportunity?

We efficiently train our forces for deployment. Throughout the past nine years, we have streamlined the training process. We have managed to be effective—even with a shortage of organic equipment at home stations and the requirement to build our battle rosters within 90 days of "wheels up." But we have now reached a "T" in the road to training adaptability. Are we providing training on how to develop training? Our junior leaders can articulate what it is that they are doing and why, but they cannot explain how they got there. When I ask them,

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“How does this tie into your mission-essential task list?” or “Which collective task does this support?” the usual reply is a blank stare. This lack of understanding is not their fault; it’s the result of an adaptive force taking care of business at a fast pace. We need to be aware of this shortfall and realize that we have an expanding gap that might be felt years down the road. We need to deliberately train our subordinates, and our subordinates need to undergo self-development, because there simply isn’t time for institutional training in this area. (For example, from one-station unit training through graduation from the Sergeants Major Academy, our NCOs spend a total of only 17 months in a classroom environment.) Take a look at the professional development programs that are in place. Evaluate whether they are effective or whether they are routine and outdated. Test yourself by comparing the last couple of years’ worth of quarterly and annual training guidance.

Our Corps is full of talented, courageous Soldiers and leaders. But the OPTEMPO has caused gaps in many areas. We must recognize and mitigate these gaps to ensure that the next generation is on track. The OPTEMPO has also had a somewhat positive impact on leader development. One day, our young team leaders and platoon leaders will be required to understand the details of how and why our Army operates the way it does. They will need to value tradition and understand standards in order to train and enforce them. Institutional training is not always the answer; true learning occurs through operational experience. We do what we can at the U.S. Army Military Police School to fill in the gaps, but the real bridges are built in your own grid square.

As always, please keep our warriors who are in harm’s way—and their families—in your hearts and prayers. Be safe, enjoy yourselves, and continue your great service to our Regiment, our Army, and this great Nation.

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Of the Troops! For the Troops! NCOs Lead the Way!

Endnote:

Article 15 of U.S. Code, Title 10, *Armed Forces*, Subtitle A, Part II, Chapter 47, “Uniform Code of Military Justice,” governs the issuance of nonjudicial punishment for relatively minor disciplinary offenses.