
Regimental Command Sergeant Major



Command Sergeant Major Charles R. Kirkland



Building the Military Police Professional: Enlisted Personnel Management in Your Grid Square

Have you ever viewed yourself as an architect? Have you ever sat back and thought: In a perfect world, the perfect enlisted leader would have done this . . . attended that . . . successfully held these positions . . . ? As senior leaders, we understand and value the clarity of hindsight. Because we are products of our upbringing, our personal career path tends to serve as the baseline for our well-intended guidance. But is it enough?

When talking to junior NCOs, I like to draw an analogy using high-definition television (HDTV) and ultra-high frequency (UHF) television, with HDTV representing senior leaders and UHF television representing junior NCOs. Some of you old-timers know what I am talking about; however, when I mention “UHF,” the younger Soldiers often look at me like I am speaking in code. The point of the analogy, though, is that it is the detail that we see through our experience that gives us clarity. And it is this clarity that allows us to professionally guide those coming up behind us, ensuring that they have successful careers and that our units have qualified military police who are capable of leading at the highest levels of our Regiment and our Army. I realize that, so far, this sounds like pontification—but let me delve a little deeper.



**. . . it is the detail
that we see through
our experience that
gives us clarity.
And it is this
clarity that allows
us to professionally
guide those coming
up behind us . . .**

The personnel management landscape has changed significantly. With decentralization, we no longer hold the exclusive key to the placement of a large population of our subordinates. And the U.S. Army Human Resources Command (Military Police Branch), which manages personnel assignments, places a priority on the aggregate, rather than on the professional development of individuals. This situation, coupled with various personnel accounts on an installation, creates an uphill battle for the senior enlisted leader who is interested in making sure that the right person is placed in the right position for mission success and professional development. A single assignment can derail a Soldier’s professional development, and no one is better equipped to determine the needs of an enlisted Soldier than a sergeant major or command sergeant major who “grew up” in the same career management field. However, over time, this responsibility has been handed over to personnel specialists, who require the input of military police leaders to fight their way into the process. With the current structure and enlisted management processes in place, our sphere of influence is limited to our organization at our specific geographic location. Until our direction is corrected, there will be long-term negative impacts on readiness and professional development. In spite of all of this, when a Soldier lands in your grid square, you have a mission.

The Human Resources Command fills a requisition by assigning a particular Soldier to a specific installation; however, when an enlisted Soldier arrives at an installation, receiving leaders evaluate the situation and assign the individual to a specific position based on mission requirements. This can have a significant positive or negative effect on professional growth and development through operational experience, which is the key building block of professional military police—a building block that represents a combined effort among the Military Police Branch, Human Resources Command; the receiving organization’s senior leadership (military police or not); and the individual. Personal attention from all three of these entities is necessary to ensure that the mission requirements of the organization and the professional needs of the individual are met. The mission, of course, takes priority; and a conscious effort is required to simultaneously meet the needs of the unit and the professional development needs of the individual. We are all familiar with the sharp, squared-away, “go to” NCO working in our operations section or provost marshal office who was passed over for promotion by the previous two consecutive boards. On the surface, this doesn’t make any sense. But in evaluating the NCO’s record, it is apparent that the minimum requirements in key leadership positions have not been met. Although the NCO may have previously served as a squad leader, his or her expert PowerPoint skills may have been needed in company operations after only a few months. This may sound simplistic, but it happens; NCOs are slotted based on a single skill or additional skill identifier (ASI), they become comfortable specializing, and then they can’t figure out why they struggle with mission accomplishment or why they cannot get promoted.

Unfortunately, they are not prepared for levels of higher responsibility. Don't allow specialized skills to cause a Soldier to get stuck in a rut or leaders to make lazy personnel management decisions.

But what about our current practice of personnel management by ASI? Does it still work? Does supply meet demand? Or is the operational demand so great that management by ASI degrades mission effectiveness and professional development? I will use the management of our canine (K9) program as an example of how the current system might work against the mission and the Soldier.

Due to the invaluable capabilities that K9 assets bring to the battlefield, Soldiers with an ASI of Z6 are in high demand. As a result, we have unassigned dogs and are continually scrambling to get Soldiers trained and teams certified and deployed. Since ASIs can be managed at 150 percent strength, this doesn't make sense to an outsider (or to an insider who doesn't understand the system). The common misconception is that Military Police Corps leaders must be guilty of "mismanagement," when in fact, the problem is actually overmanagement. In this strained system, mission demand is outstripping the supply, which is fed by a flawed personnel system. Leaders are being forced to move Z6-qualified Soldiers from the K9 program to fill key 31B leader development positions so that they can remain competitive with their peers. Many of our squad leader and platoon sergeant positions are currently filled by Z6-qualified Soldiers, operations sergeants, or first sergeants. And commanders must weigh other organizational mission requirements that may also result in the need for Z6-qualified Soldiers to provide support elsewhere. So, we train young Soldiers with minimal experience, send them downrange, and end up with large percentages of the authorized 150 percent ASI strength working outside the program in other key 31B positions. And because the ranks of K9 positions below kennel master are staff sergeant and below, it is not likely that these now-seasoned NCOs will ever go back to working with dogs. Instead, they will continue to advance, working their way up and out of the ranks included in the program. And the Z6 Soldiers will end up losing their K9 skill proficiency. This is a vicious cycle that must be challenged.

... what about our current practice of personnel management by ASI? Does it still work? Does supply meet demand? Or is the operational demand so great that management by ASI degrades mission effectiveness and professional development?

Would the Army and our Soldiers be better served by transforming the Z6 skill set into a military occupational specialty? After all, it is not possible to professionalize around an ASI; there is no professional track, no progressive or developmental career path, and no advanced training. In addition, the necessarily high rate of movement into and out of the career field is not conducive to the development of the Soldier's skill proficiency, growth, or competitiveness in advancement against his or her peers. Fortunately, commanders are not mandated to place Z6-qualified Soldiers with dogs—or to assign a lengthy mandated time of service with a dog. Doing so would constrain commanders and place Soldiers at an even greater disadvantage for promotions. But as a military occupational specialty, there would be a logical, systematic career path that included the Noncommissioned Officer Education System and the advanced training necessary to professionalize the program and prepare for the mission at hand. There would be no need to move Soldiers in and out of the program; they would be requisitioned and employed specifically for the purpose of working with dogs—eliminating the "obligation" for commanders to "mismanage" this great asset. And Soldiers would compete with their peers for promotions within the military occupational specialty and professional career track. In addition, cohesive teams would be built and those teams would stay together—an essential element in our line of work.

The example of the K9 program was used to stimulate thought about how we manage the enlisted population throughout our Regiment. Our Army is changing, and we must ask ourselves if our personnel management and assignment practices are keeping pace. This aspect of career development deserves our attention to ensure that our Soldiers are getting the full benefit of operational experience.

The mission of building professional future leaders of our Regiment should be viewed as exactly that—a mission. There are challenges, but your personal involvement in effective counseling and your engagement of the Human Resources Command and, when necessary, adjacent commands, when making internal moves will profoundly impact the building of future leaders. Continue to challenge systems that affect our enlisted population.

As always, I ask that you keep our Soldiers who are currently deployed and in harm's way—and the family members that await their safe return—in your thoughts and prayers.

“Of the Troops and For the Troops”