

Walter A. Schrepel
10th Mountain Division
Fort Drum, New York

Kenneth D. Shive
Department of English
West Point, New York

Can COHORT Cure Careerism?

Careerism is an important issue in today's armed forces. Roughly speaking, careerism is action motivated solely out of self-serving desire to protect and advance one's military career, even at the expense of one's colleagues and one's unit. In this essay I will put forth two points about careerism: first, that the Army's COHORT program, which strives to improve unit efficiency through group cohesion and organizational values, can discourage and hinder the careerist attitude; and second, that the Tenth Mountain Division's implementation of COHORT has reduced careerism among its servicemen and fostered more professional attitudes.

COHORT is a program to restructure Army units, to turn them into better fighting units. In COHORT units, soldiers and their leaders are stabilized for thirty-six months within a specific unit. This way of doing business began in 1981 as an improvement over an individual replacement system which caused considerable personnel turbulence in Army units. Stability of assignments in COHORT battalions appears to promote increased combat readiness through the cohesion and bonding which occurs in this setting.

Careerism fits into a discussion of the ethical implications of COHORT because the careerist embodies the

very antithesis of COHORT leadership. A careerist, after all, is "a totally self-seeking person ... intent only on advancing to the best jobs and highest rank, no matter what the cost to other people or to the service" (Stromberg et al, 34). The careerist can be understood as an ethical egoist, a person whose moral direction focuses on actions which have the greatest likelihood of providing the most personal gain. Any military officer who subscribes to this moral theory will find himself out of place in the COHORT brotherhood with its commitment to organizational excellence.

A unit's effectiveness arises from the cohesion, commitment, cooperation, communications and coordination, which are fostered in a healthy professional climate. While such attributes may more readily describe a monastic order, they also are an apt account of the ideal COHORT battalion which serves as a military brotherhood (Malone, 2). Such characteristics have a long history, for they mark successful combat units from the Roman Legion to the pre-World War One regiments of the old U.S. Army. Certainly, the cohesion and commitment of soldiers and leaders assigned to specific fighting units have enhanced the combat effectiveness of our fighting forces. It's safe to say that leadership able to inspire soldiers to courageous service must display moral as well as technical excellence. Technically proficient officers who lack selfless dedication to the men and mission have always been handicapped in their

ability to create and maintain bonds of a military brotherhood. This country's freedom was won two hundred years ago by leaders who could give their men little more than leadership; the tremendous increase in technical warfare should not lead us to neglect these more basic leadership skills. In his novel Once An Eagle, Anton Myrer's pernicious Courtney Massengale certainly knows the technical aspects of his craft, while only a Sam Damon brings together technical excellence with an excellence of character to gain the unending devotion of his soldiers.

Now, COHORT offers the U.S. Army the best opportunity for its leaders to create the kind of unit Sam Damon led. By the stability in COHORT assignments, the battalion community provides the sense of long-term identification between the officer, his peers, colleagues, and unit. If its officers have provided proper leadership, the battalion will possess values that make up the moral strengths of professional soldiers. These norms are not merely viewed as the standards for field training; rather they are the moral foundation for developing ethically selfless officers.

Incorporating the COHORT program into the battalion organization is a useful approach to the training of officers, since the program's structure incorporates soldierly virtues that officers need to embody: dedication to both technical and moral excellence. Nevertheless, a nagging question still remains: can COHORT cure careerism? If managed properly, COHORT can be a positive influence in

curbing the encroachment of careerism on the development of officers.

Simply put, the COHORT leadership structure devalues the disenfranchised, self-serving leadership style favored by the careerist, and so places obstacles in that approach to advancement, while simultaneously rewarding more selfless attitudes that include dedication to one's fellow officers and to the success of the unit's mission. In COHORT units leaders are more open to the sort of close scrutiny that will reveal the careerist's motives. The additional time men serve together in COHORT units helps in two ways: first, officers learn one another's ways, and self-serving attitudes will become clear with time; and second, the extended periods men serve together make it far less easy to take advantage of one another, and far more risky to try, knowing that earning distrust will condemn the careerist to many months during which his evaluations will be tied together with men whose enmity he has earned. In all these ways, the lukewarm commitment of a careerist will doom his efforts to profit within the COHORT leadership structure. Furthermore, the dynamics of the COHORT organizational program would cure or temper the careerist to such a degree that his actions would be more selfless as opposed to self-serving, with the long term effect of improving his character.

Now, I want to focus my remarks on how the 10th Mountain Division has implemented COHORT. Here, leaders and

followers join together to strengthen unit cohesion through equal emphasis on both technical competence and moral excellence. Soldiers arrive at Fort Drum following a bonding process among themselves as "survivors" of the One Station Unit Training (OSUT). To maintain these bonds, teams of new arrivals are assigned to a parent battalion, keeping the same unit integrity at the team, squad, and platoon levels when possible.

At the same time, newly assigned officers complete Light Fighters Training, an important step toward developing vertical cohesion between the officer and his soldiers. For two weeks the new battalion conducts extensive training both in individual as well as collective tasks. Additionally, newly assigned officers complete battalion cadre training where they are introduced to the standards, policies, and heritage of the battalion. The orientation of new officers is done by those who already have served several years within the unit. In this way, the officer leader and follower both become assimilated into "living" units much like the regiments of the old frontier days and the inter-war Army units which survived hard times.

The dynamics of this program might be expressed as a function of variables inherent in the cohesion building process: cohesion being the net sum of leadership plus values plus stability. Such results are only achieved when leaders live, and not pretend to live, by the Professional Army Ethic which comprises traditional values: courage,

candor, competence, and commitment. The leader who fails to subscribe to these ideals will hurt the cohesion and training of the unit; his leadership skills will not be the sincere "living" skills that get others to charge the hill.

While COHORT may be a good medication for the professional illness of careerism, it alone cannot be a panacea for forces within the military which have fueled careerism. Practically speaking, COHORT'S implementation faces several obstacles, the most serious being the influence of our own culture in placing individuality at the forefront of all concerns. George Will has railed against the misdirected praise of political philosophies which successfully promulgates this deification of the individual, where individual desires and passions get top billing. Dedication to the unit and its mission contrasts sharply with the traditional respect our country gives to the individual as supreme arbiter of personal priorities. In such a culture it's no small wonder that careerism may be unwittingly supported by an organizational style that grades officers by their individual accomplishments, and not by their individual contributions to the unit's accomplishments.

Another important advantage for COHORT is that the new officer coming from his officer basic course is uncorrupted by the ethical shortcomings of the current individual replacement system. As such, idealism should remain high while the exhortations from lectures are still vivid in his

mind. In the Army, the lessons of basic, airborne, and ranger school teamwork are the foundations for developing individual understanding of the ethical dimensions of being an officer; graduating into a COHORT unit allows a unit-centered structure to be the next step in an officer's development, rather than leaving the officer to look for just his own development. Part of the charm of the COHORT program is that it intrinsically reinforces the unit orientation by bringing the new officer into an environment of fellow officers similarly motivated; furthermore, it does this just at the time when the new officer must begin applying his basic skills into leadership roles.

I believe professional growth may be superior in COHORT than in non-COHORT battalions because COHORT is not just a mere collection of individuals randomly tossed together, "catch as catch can," for a limited time. The battalion is a home, as well as a community in which success or failure of the unit rests with each soldier. Such responsibility is not easily communicated and shared by members of a non-COHORT unit.

In this environment I believe careerism will find itself dampened by the officer's identification with the unit. The character that may be developed by one's experience and education in this unit makes it more probable that the leadership will choose the proper course of action on the battlefield or in garrison while putting aside personal interests. This leader will more likely be

influenced at this vital juncture in his professional development to be virtuous because of COHORT's demanding environment. Much like Plato's description of the charioteer who trains and guides the horses in his train, COHORT's own structure should restrain the rebellious drive of self-interest (Phaedrus, lines 254e1-e11).

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