

Mission First, Education Always

Balancing operations and PME

by Maj Christopher M. Davis

Developing strategic thinkers and educating military leaders should receive the highest priority from Service component initiatives. The demands of the world require us, as the warfighting organizations, to inquire far more “innovatively, flexibly, broadly, and boldly” to cope with the rigors and dangers of these threats.¹ The intellectual cultivation and retention of the junior officer community is of critical importance to the future effectiveness of the Armed Forces. The military must find a balance between operational requirements and a deliberate focus on progressive and prioritized educational opportunities in leadership, future technologies, warfare, regional cultural and languages, as well as global policies.²

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The U.S. Armed Forces exist to deter potential adversaries and defeat threats to our Nation's security interests. Today, the United States has one of the world's most experienced global forces in combat operations. Further, the DOD contains a concentration of leaders who have passed through a generation's worth of challenges and commanded at senior levels.³ Yet, global threats and uncertainties today are more challenging than ever faced in our Na-

tion's history and continue to grow every day. Maintaining our asymmetric global military advantage requires innovative, adaptive, and critical thinkers within our ranks who are intellectually equipped to confront the unique threats posed in the 21st century.

“Plants are shaped by cultivation and men by education.”

—Jean-Jaques Rousseau, Emile (“On Education”)



We need to find a balance between operational requirements and educational opportunities.

(Photo by LCpl Rhita Daniel.)

Background

Inside last year's DOD annual proposed budget, each Service allocated funding to thousands of schools and educational opportunities, ranging from one-week primers to graduate-level or doctoral programs. These training programs contributed toward readiness and crafting of military strategy. While each Service must maintain its autonomy to dictate spending to best serves its mission, this article will highlight numerous growing initiatives

within the Department of the Navy and postulate how expanding these programs to junior officers enhances the ability of the Services to defeat strategic challenges while encouraging retention rates of the most talented future leaders.⁴

As recently as 2016, the Navy conducted a comprehensive review of educational opportunities available to officers. Directed by then-Secretary of the Navy, the study—beginning in 1919⁵—evaluated various naval initiatives directed at educating the young officer corps. Nearly 100 years ago, the Knox-King-Pye Board recognized the naval profession as the “most varied in the world.”⁶ To successfully confront national security interests in a challenging global environment, a focus on “leadership, material skills, judgment, [and] operations” was required.⁷

Investing in junior officer education opportunities emerged as a priority following World War II when officers were appallingly deficient with recent advancements in technology, world events, and other demands of the modern military.⁸ Nearly a decade later, the Navy began involuntarily selecting its most promising junior officers to attend the Naval War College for graduate education in both technical and non-technical degrees.⁹ For the remainder of the century, the Navy and Marine Corps’ emphasis on educational opportunities would ebb and flow in a reactive nature to global conflicts, budgetary concerns, and force manipulation requirements.

Analysis

Today, educational standards within the Navy and Marine Corps cannot be quantified solely based on current military threat expectations. Standards must also reflect the educational level of current societal trends.¹⁰ While selfless service should be one’s primary call to service, in an effort to attract and retain fit and qualified individuals, the military competes with the private sector. As a result, Services spend significant sums of salary, benefits, and the indirect costs of an All-Volunteer Force. This is important not only to ensure the U.S. remains best postured



CMC briefs Marine officers attending top-level schools and Command and Staff College. (Photo by LCpl Timothy Turner.)

“It is a common mistake in going to war to begin at the wrong end, to act first, and wait our disaster to discuss the matter.”

—Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War

to challenge global threats with highly educated and critical thinkers, but to retain the most talented officers who are unafraid of missed educational opportunities in the civilian sector. Investing in the Services’ junior officers is not a new concept, as evident by the dozens of boards and commissions formed to evaluate educational priorities and to support the need.

Today, there is a widely held belief that the Navy and Marine Corps does a respectable job developing officers within their military occupational specialties and warfare communities. While the Marine Corps allocates tremendous resources to ensure “Every Marine a Rifleman” and sending all second lieutenants to TBS to train as provisional infantry rifle platoon com-

manders, both Services have done a less effective job preparing officers for the later stages of one’s careers—when assignments require a variety of technical expertise beyond primary warfare areas. Therefore, deliberate steps should be considered and supported by Service leadership to ensure a continuation of learning and education for constant self-improvement in preparation for accepting greater responsibility, facing modern threats, and promotion.

U.S. Navy. Professional development education in the Navy “prepares career officers for more demanding assignments, particularly command and staff positions” concerning military science, engineering, and management.¹¹ These educational opportunities are supported by Service schools such as the Naval War College Naval Post Graduate School and—to a lesser extent—civilian institutions. This swath of educational opportunities cost the Navy approximately \$180.5 million a year and involves approximately 9,000 students. As it pertains to professional development education, the Navy invests roughly twelve percent of its anticipated budget further educating career officers for increased responsibility and command.

The civil engineer officer community presents a successful model for a methodical educational support struc-

ture. As a community, the Seabees are highly technical officers who provide facilities management and construction engineering expertise within the Navy's staff corps. It is widely accepted within the community that between promotion to lieutenant (junior grade) and lieutenant, the opportunity to attend graduate school is built into the officer's career path. Officers within the community are given one year to receive their Master of Science or Master of Engineering degree from a variety of respectable civilian institutions across the country. The training is typically utilized to enhance the junior officer's engineering skillset, preparing them for either contingency type operations or domestic public works billets.

Similarly, as a focal point within the Navy's professional development education plan, the Naval War College and Naval Post Graduate School provide education and technical training to "increase intellectual flexibility" and prepare officers for positions of significant responsibility while addressing complex national security issues.¹² Not only do these schools provide valuable training, but they provide graduate-level degrees universally respected in the civilian sector.

Buried amongst thousands of pages of the President's Budget Book submission requests for fiscal year 2018, the Navy increased spending nearly \$1.7 million (baseline \$6.1 million) for a Secretary of the Navy "talent management initiative," associated with the Fleet Scholarship Educational Program.¹³ The program would permit 30 officers to attend rigorous academic programs, averaging two years in duration, aimed at improving retention and strategic education for unrestricted line and information warfare officers.¹⁴ The courses of study were not limited to technical degrees.

U.S. Marine Corps. The Marine Corps, in its capacity as part of the Department of the Navy, represents four percent of the DOD's proposed budget. With an anticipated \$26.3 billion budget, 27 states in the U.S. operate at a higher annual expense than the Marine Corps. Still, the Marine Corps expects \$100 million to support and fund "cours-

es of institution to acquire skills to meet minimum requirements" of military occupational specialty, which includes—for officers—TBS in Quantico.

The focus of the Marine Corps' professional development education funds centered on enhancing the abilities and qualities of leaders for increased command and staff responsibilities. Contained within the alarmingly small \$46.5 million budget, the Marine Corps supports the Marine Corps University, the Marine Corps War College, Lejeune Leadership Institute, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, School of Advanced Warfighting, and Expeditionary Warfare School.

Of particulate interest is the operational cost for Expeditionary Warfare School (\$1.6 million), Command and Staff College (\$3.9 million), and School of Advanced Warfighting (\$1 million). For under \$7 million, the Marine Corps trains 450 officers annually in graduate-level studies and prepares leadership for the complexities of the modern battlefield.

Additionally, in August 2017, the Marine Corps released *MarAdmin 418/17*, providing funding to four qualified Marine majors or lieutenant colonels to complete doctorate-level education to develop a "cohort of strategic thinkers and technical leaders ... to achieve the innovative thinking desired by the Marine Corps."¹⁵ Similar to the Navy's initiative, the Marine Corps' program will not be limited to technical degrees. The *MarAdmin* went on to explain,

Uniformed doctorates provide the Marine Corps deployable, highly-skilled manpower in support of senior leader decision-making as well as helping generate national, defense, and service strategies in an [increasingly] complex world.¹⁶

The Knox-King-Pye Board of 1919 would be ecstatic. According to the President's Budget Book, this initiative would cost the Corps \$282,000.

Conclusion

In 1944, the Pye Board proposed to the Secretary of the Navy that approximately fifteen percent of line officers should be involved in educational

"Every war is a rich unique episode. Each is an uncharted sea, full of reefs."

***—Carl von Clausewitz,
On War***

pursuits at any time.¹⁷ In the Naval Service, this would capture approximately 11,000 officers:¹⁸ a far-cry from current available educational opportunities.

While the challenges of the world have changed and the distinctive nature of each Service remains critically important to the success of the Nation's military mission, educational funding needs to remain within the sight picture of leaders.

The DOD Budget Request for fiscal year 2018 was one of the largest in history. At nearly \$640 billion, only a handful of years in our Nation's history has Congress appropriated a higher level of defense spending. While the two highlighted initiatives by the Navy and Marine Corps represented steps in the right direction, the fact remains that less than one-tenth of one percent of budget expenditures is allocated to support the education of officers: the next generation of global leaders.

The *John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act* for fiscal year 2019 is the largest defense spending budget ever proposed. At nearly \$716 billion, only a handful of years in our Nation's history has Congress appropriated a higher level of defense spending compared to the Nation's gross domestic product. While the two highlighted initiatives by the Navy and Marine Corps represented steps in the right direction, the fact remains that less than one-tenth of one percent of budget expenditures is allocated to support the education of officers.

Investing in our most precious resource, the junior officers and future leaders, is a worthy investment. It will have immediate effects upon national security and mission accomplishment by providing senior leaders "generate



The taxpayer expects its military to be able to combat each and every growing threat to the Nation's security. (Photo by LCpl Laurie Pearson.)

national, defense, and service strategies,”¹⁹ while aiding in the retention of the best talent. At a cost of \$32 million, the Army has made tremendous efforts to educate its rising field-grade officers at their branch-specific Captain's Career Courses.²⁰ Upon completion of this (roughly) twenty-week curriculum, the Army affords its officers the opportunity to complete the minimal remaining credit hours toward a functional master's degree, relatable to their job specialty. The insinuation here is not that spending more money will necessarily fix any educational job in the Naval Service, but rather the recognition by the Army of an educational necessity.

In 1890, Spenser Wilkinson, a British journalist turned military professor, published *The Brain of an Army* where he described how the German's military superiority had less to do with the size of its force and quality of technology. Rather, the strength of the German army was in how its general staff thought about the next war, and the focus provided to developing its own military intellectuals to develop strategic vision and plans to combat emerging threats.²¹

These pilot programs put forth by the Naval Service far exceeded the Army's current program. They should continue to serve as a foothold, gaining momentum until every career-designated young

officer is afforded the opportunity to complete a graduate-level educational course of study commensurate to societal norms. The taxpayer expects his military to be able to combat each and every growing threat to the Nation's security. Maintaining this global advantage requires innovative thinkers and scholars within our ranks. We must give the taxpayers what they expect.

Notes

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