

The Officer Education System: Future Challenges for Armor Officers

by Captain Thomas J. Nagle

The Armor Captains Career Course (ACCC) is preparing to meet the future challenges of educating our officers with the new Officer Education System (OES) transformation. Concepts that will be implemented in the new emerging courses are now being applied in the ACCC course during a test phase prior to the pilot course in November 2002. The ACCC currently is not meeting the needs of its graduates because of issues that will be magnified in the coming transformation. These issues must be carefully thought out and corrected prior to implementing the new courses to prevent a generation of officers from failing to meet the needs of the new battlefield environment.

In May of 2001, the results of a study chartered by U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General Eric Shinseki, were released. The Army Training and Leader Development Panel (ATLDP) identified char-

acteristics and skills required by leaders of the transforming force.¹ Technology was recognized as a factor in the changing operational environment, but the centerpiece of the formations in the Army remained soldiers and leaders. As for the leaders, they will be forced to operate in a more complex battlefield where "tactical actions by lieutenants, sergeants, corporals, and their commanders can have strategic consequences."² In an environment that is generally recognized as more complex than previous battlefields, it logically follows that successful leaders must be better educated in tactical problemsolving, more effective in using the rapidly changing technological aspect of warfighting, and better versed in managing the multiple facets of support operations and stability operations. In addition, the staff officers that support the commanders must likewise have a thorough understanding of these issues when the first warning

order (WARNO) for deployment is written.

The study identified several areas in which the current OES is failing to meet the needs of the changing environment. The OES is underresourced and not coordinated with the Army's needs, primarily because it has been largely unchanged since the end of the Cold War.³ The study suggests several remedies to address these shortfalls, including placing the most professionally qualified instructors in all leader-level schools. In addition, schools must identify and teach to established tasks and purposes. These tasks should be focused based on the type of school the officer is attending and must ensure officers are educated to a common standard. Finally, the schools must be vertically integrated, ensuring that the sequence of schools the officer attends is coordinated with the officer's assignments and builds on the previous school's instruction, and are horizontally integrated, ensuring officers are educated to a common standard between branches.⁴

The Current Armor Education System

The ACCC is attempting to remedy some of the problems identified in the study as far as establishing common tasks and enhancing the graduate's experience level in positions he will occupy in the near future. Conceptually, the course identifies proficiency levels in various tasks that the graduate should achieve. Tasks are categorized as: master tasks, which the graduate must perform without the aid of references; know tasks, which the graduate must perform with minimal aid from a reference such as a field manual; and understand tasks, which the graduate must be able to locate pertinent information on.

To address experience enhancement, a gauntlet concept is applied, and students from several schools participate in a training exercise in positions they will occupy in the force. For example, ACCC students act as company commanders while AOB students act as platoon leaders. These gauntlets can be conducted in live maneuver training ex-



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"Conceptually, the ACCC should focus on five master tasks that will do the most to develop students and prepare them to act as commanders or battle captains. These tasks include conducting troop-leading procedures (TLP), rapid decisionmaking that results in a standard overlay order, being lethal at the point of contact, inspecting a company, and land navigation."

The master task of being lethal at the point of contact receives little emphasis for the individual student. During live, force-on-force gauntlets, this problem is somewhat alleviated, but due to the rapid move from mission to mission, training opportunities are missed for the participants. For example, during the AOB 10-day war, the students execute two company missions per day during the last 4 days. The scenarios are canned and the time between missions is rushed. As a result, captains working in the tactical operations center (TOC) do not get an opportunity to experience an MDMP. In addition, the commander has limited opportunities to conduct assembly area operations since there can be as little as 3 hours between missions with different chains of command, and the lieutenants have little interaction with commanders to learn from their experience due to the need to rush to the line of departure. The shortcuts taken undermine the master task of executing TLP to standard, and provide no reinforcement to any tasks executed in the TOC.

In theory, *TacOps* gives a would-be commander multiple opportunities to test his tactical abilities in a computer game simulator with few required resources. I believe *TacOps* is a poor method to assess a commander's tactical ability. Furthermore, it does not support any of the master tasks identified by the course, except perhaps be-

ing lethal at the point of contact. However, direct-fire planning during OPORD production is not effectively replicated in *TacOps*. Additionally, for a commander, being lethal at the point of contact should mean giving timely, concise orders for subordinates to follow. Selecting commands from a drop-down menu in a turn-based game gives a player unlimited time and no room for the computer to misinterpret orders. There are also enough game-isms in *TacOps* to allow the player to win without sound tactical decisions, and not enough unpredictability in the computer-based OPFOR to simulate a thinking enemy. The 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review from the Pentagon, despite its emphasis on developing new technologies, recognizes that "simulations and war games have inherent limits in terms of how far they can go in identifying new forms of operation."⁹ Relying heavily on games to teach tactics in a rapidly changing battlefield environment will therefore have serious limitations.

The Transformation

During the distance-learning scenario, two SGIs will monitor computer-based training for a class of 48 students to educate them on the basics of military operations and being a commander. These two SGIs will also instruct the students during the resident phase of the class. During the resident phase, the course will be almost exclusively product-based

instruction, as the students are evaluated in their success as commanders during the gauntlet exercises. The tentative plan for the CABCC has the first 3 days devoted to gauntlets executed via *TacOps*, the next 5 days devoted to gauntlets executed in CCTT and SIMNET, and the final 16 days devoted to gauntlets in live scenarios with tanks and HMMWVs.

It is doubtful that students will have the opportunity to fill command positions a full 10 percent of the time, as is being experienced now. Instead of a small group of 12 students waiting to command in simulations, 24 students will be waiting — assuming each SGI takes one-half the class and personally observes the captain's performance to grade him. With less time to interact with SGIs in the condensed course, more time will be spent waiting to perform a meaningful duty during gauntlet exercises. With the difficulty of coordinating multiple schools to provide personnel during CCTT and live gauntlets, CABCC students will likely need to cover down on non-leadership positions such as gunners, loaders, and wing-tank commanders. This situation does little to address the problem of providing students with a better education in tactical problemsolving from the commander's position.

With the emphasis on execution in the new CABCC, there is no time to participate in process execution events such as MDMP and staff briefings. (Currently, 100 hours are devoted to this during ACCC.) It is doubtful that distance learning can offer an effective alternative to learning complex processes, such as the MDMP, to classroom based, group efforts during these exercises. The intent may not be to focus on this since the resident phase is referred to as the "Company Commander's Course." However, no alternative has been identified to teaching this, unless it is taught in CASC, which would still be distance-learning based.

Without this time to execute the MDMP in a classroom group setting, there is little time for students to learn from each other's experience. Ask an infantry student at the ACCC how he learned to employ tanks, or an armor student how he learned to employ dismounted infantry or scout assets. Chances are, they learned them in discussions while executing the course of action development step of the MDMP. In addition, students will have experienced the Middle East, Korea, the

CTCs, Bosnia, and possibly Afghanistan. There is no time for students to explore the differences in operating in these environments through classroom discussions under the current plan.

With only two SGIs available to teach 48 students, the commanders in charge of the troops teaching these classes will have fewer people providing input to the course structure and content. Incidentally, a class size of 48, rather than the 70 to 80 students currently attending ACCC classes, will mean less time between teaches for troops to process students each year, leaving less time to update or revise the course. As a result, once the course is "packaged" for the computer, the distance learning-based portion has a real risk of becoming stale and outdated in the midst of the rapid changes identified by the ATLDP. Therefore, the course will become isolated from the force and will fall short of meeting the needs of the Army.

As far as the instruction that is not addressed in the current plan for the CABCC, the burden falls to the units to make up the shortfalls. This means person-to-person instruction in areas such as TTPs for conducting rehearsals, COA development and analysis, wargaming, and conducting staff briefings. I assume this will not take place after a captain serves his time as a commander, since a large percentage of captains move to non-branch assignments following command, which means the instruction must take place before command. From my experience, a FORSCOM unit has little time to devote to teaching a support platoon leader how to conduct a task force rehearsal, the S1 to conduct a wargame, or the battalion maintenance officer to conduct a course of action briefing. The experience in a battalion to teach these things is concentrated in a few individuals that have a great deal to accomplish daily, even when not preparing for a major training event.

An Opportunity

The move to the new course structures is inevitable. However, the content and method of teaching these courses is not set in stone. I believe it is possible to organize the courses to follow a logical progression, teach the important processes, and ensure they remain relevant to the needs of the Army. By meeting these standards, we will provide better-educated officers that are current with recent trends in TTPs and technology.

First and foremost, course instructors must be increased to one SGI for every 6 to 8 students. This will allow the SGI to provide more timely feedback and answer questions the students will have during the distance-learning portion. This will also free up time for SGIs to actively provide feedback and adjust the POI after course structure experience accumulates. During the resident phase, students will also have more interaction with the SGIs, ensuring instruction time is used to the maximum possible extent.

Revise the master tasks and ensure the POI supports them. Possible candidates include TLPs, rapid decisionmaking that results in a FRAGO, preparing a company training plan, and executing the MDMP. The definition of a "master" task may need to be revised (references will be needed), but it is at these tasks that new commanders and battle captains must be proficient. Other tasks, such as know and understand, must be covered in other course work, but should support learning the master tasks. Alternatively, each course has master tasks that support the following courses. This achieves the vertical integration identified by the ATLDP study and focuses students on tasks relevant to their next assignment. In addition, clear conditions and standards must exist for every master task.

The distance-learning portion of the course must focus on teaching the basics of operations, such as deliberate attack, defense, and movement to contact, in addition to MDMP basics to prepare students to execute these tasks once they arrive for the resident phase. Training management can be covered during the distance-learning phase to address the "training plan" master task. Rather than use *TacOps* as a gauntlet exercise at the school during the resident phase, it should be used during the distance-learning phase to convey specific concepts in tactical operations. While I do not believe *TacOps* is effective in a free-play scenario to teach captains actual tactics, it can be useful to illustrate concepts and the effectiveness of certain courses of action. Students will begin to cultivate ideas to use in the resident phase during discussions and gauntlets.

During the resident phase, implement discussions within smaller groups of 6 to 8 students to address tactical problems presented in vignettes. Students should have at least 1 week to discuss ideas, solutions, and develop quick

FRAGOs to implement solutions. This process is used as a means to select the winner of the tactics competition at the end of the ACCC course, so it must have some value as a teaching tool. Each group should easily cover 2 to 3 vignettes per day and should update or change them to meet their specific group needs. Feedback can be provided to students on their FRAGOs, and will assist in determining the effectiveness of their delivery methods. This will support the master task of quick decision-making and allow students to learn from other's experiences. Furthermore, it will address the flexibility issue identified by the ATLDP study.

One full week should be devoted to executing the MDMP deliberately and writing orders. Conventional wisdom suggests that this is not enough, but no more time is available. Additionally, student skills will be honed in executing this process during gauntlet exercises in the final 2 weeks. With fewer students, there will be no need to include "soft positions," such as the air defense officer who has a smaller role in the MDMP, and redundant work will be reduced. Student work can focus on the XO, S3, S2, S3A, S1/S4 (use only one logistics planner), engineer, and field artillery officer. Obviously, this supports the MDMP master task.

Finally, gauntlet exercises should be substantially scaled back. The time a student spends at the schoolhouse under the supervision of an SGI has just become much more important. Rushing from mission to mission, as we do now during live gauntlets, wastes time. The Armor School has ample experience to know that this does nothing to reinforce good habits in lieutenants and captains. Furthermore, this robs captains of an opportunity to go through a deliberate mission analysis. It also ties up a great deal of manpower in meaningless positions, such as the S3 or XO, because of canned scenarios. The gauntlets, whether they are live or simulation-based, should be capstone exercises during the final 2 weeks of instruction. This should also alleviate scheduling problems, since it is difficult to coordinate field time or simulation time for two or more courses to coincide repetitively throughout the year for the entire 4-week resident phase.

For live gauntlets, events such as the AOB 10-day war should have platoon lanes staggered with company missions. During the platoon lanes, CABCC students run through a mission analysis

and produce an order for another group to execute in the company lanes. The commander should issue WARNOs and start the TLP as the platoons finish their lanes, which support the TLP master task. This involves more captains in the gauntlet by making the TOC functional and allows a commander more time to be with a company and conduct operations such as assembly area operations to standard at the end of the day. The SGI will also be able to continue to develop the staff skills of the officers executing the MDMP. The same methodology can be followed for CCTT and SIMNET exercises and allow the CABCC students to execute the MDMP, perhaps in a time-constrained environment as described in U.S. Army Field Manual 101-5, *Staff Organization and Operations*.¹⁰ Several groups can simultaneously execute the MDMP for the next day's missions. Three missions can be run daily with these simulators (with current time constraints), which allow drivers and gunners from two groups to support the third group.

After each module taught in the ACCC, an after action review is written to provide feedback on course improvement. This keeps the course relevant and use-

ful to the students. As pointed out at the beginning of this article, change is still needed and will happen. Our duty is to ensure that we can build flexibility and relevancy into the new course. Cutting the instructor staff while increasing the number of classes taught per year, focusing on product or execution-based evaluation exclusively, and wasting the time students have to interact with instructors in a face-to-face environment will do little to accomplish this. As the pilot course is implemented, hard evaluation of its effectiveness must take place. Can students pass the write-for-life after receiving only distance learning instruction? Can students understand which material from a higher headquarters' OPORD is essential to theirs? Can students execute the MDMP without guidance from an instructor present in the classroom? If not, a wide variety of issues must be addressed before full implementation.

Notes

¹Lieutenant General William M. Steele and Lieutenant Colonel Robert P. Walters Jr., "Training and Developing Army Leaders," *Military Review*, July-August 2001, p. 2.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵ACCC Weekly Training Calendar 02-003, 16 August, 2002.

⁶CPT Jason Slider, Point Paper on OES Transformation and the Combined Arms Battle Command Course, 12 February 2002, p. 1.

⁷LTC Steven Carmichael, CPT OES Significant Activities Update, July 2002, p. 2.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review Report, 30 September 2001, p. 36.

¹⁰U.S. Army Field Manual 101-5, *Staff Organization and Operations*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 31 May 1997.

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