



I hope that everyone listens to the thoughts of a tried and true warfighter, MG (Ret.) Edward Bautz, as he points out in an interesting way (“Forest or Trees: Principles or Process?”) that in our push to the future we shouldn’t all become schoolhouse theoreticians. As we move further away in time from our big war involvements, the number of combat veterans in our units and the Army decreases. The result is that we spend too much time debating and measuring and otherwise quantifying our preparedness to win the future fights than in actually doing. More and more of the articles and mail we receive contain this theme.

We should heed his advice to resist the siren call of a checklist Army. I remember the notebook of charts and lists that my predecessor as battalion XO gave me and the lists I added to it in order to keep a handle on all of the battalion’s pieces. Maybe we (maybe it was just me) are already too far down that path for our long-term good. Whether you agree with General Bautz or not, at least stop for a minute and consider why you agree, or not.

His warning on the checklist Army hits home as I look at the computer printout on my desk, just in from the local AG office (look at your own desk for an example of this phenomenon). It tells me to update my official photograph. I appreciate the reminder, since my photo is too old. However, as I read through the checklist of do’s and don’ts, I don’t appreciate some of the implications, especially after having reread Major Vandergriff’s article (March-April) on necessary cultural changes for the officer corps of the 21st century. In the reminder message, there are all of the usual warnings against being overweight, having an improperly fitted uniform,

wearing the wrong brass or unauthorized awards, having shoes unshined, and an improperly assembled sign board. It seems to me that if the remaining people in the Army are of such high quality that some of the discriminators we are using on this checklist hinge on whether both shoes reflect the same amount of light, or if a normal crease shows in a jacket, or if a guy’s sign board has letters that aren’t horizontal, we might need to come up with better discriminators.

You say I’m barking at the moon? Maybe, but it doesn’t take too much thought to get to the point. I’m not railing against official photographs here, but a system and a culture that requires us to make decisions on the future of our Army — our future leaders are our Army — based on whether both of the man’s shoes are polished the same and reflect light equally, or whether his coat shows a wrinkle, or whether his sign board is to standard, or other such “discriminators.”

If we don’t listen to the wise men from our past, we are definitely going to repeat some of the mistakes they saw and maybe even made. That is why *ARMOR* has always contained some form of history in every issue, and that is why we remain a professional bulletin and so much more than a command information document.

The man who doesn’t have time or the inclination to hear the advice of those who preceded him in this business is an ignorant man, indeed. Our profession is too hard, moves too fast, and has life and death consequences too dramatic for men only of the moment to be in the TC’s hatch.

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By Order of the Secretary of the Army:

Official:

DENNIS J. REIMER
General, United States Army
Chief of Staff

JOEL B. HUDSON
Administrative Assistant to the
Secretary of the Army

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