

From the CSM

Reducing NCOES backlog requires boots-on-the-ground leadership

By Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel A. Dailey
4th Infantry Division and U.S. Division-North

Not since the U.S. Army first identified the need for NCO academies after World War II has there been a greater demand to broaden the professional knowledge of the noncommissioned officer.

Since the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism, the high deployment rate of Army units has created a breed of Soldiers who have accumulated more real-world experience, more promotion points and a faster changeover from enlisted Soldier to noncommissioned officer.

This high operational tempo, combined with the necessary training and preparation required to sustain nearly 10 years of war has resulted in an influx of newly promoted sergeants and a backlog of NCOs in need of formal education.

Realizing the problems that arise by having a large number of Soldiers without the proper training required of an NCO, the Army chief of staff directed U.S. Army divisions to find solutions for this forecasted NCO Education System backlog. Commanders were ordered to identify unit requirements and develop resources to get their NCOs the appropriate education and training, despite high deployment rates and operational demands.

As predicted, the ensuing NCOES backlog resulted because of both high optempo and the simultaneous restructuring of brigades from legacy force formations to modular units of action.

In the spring of 2009, the 4th Infantry "Ivy" Division, after completing a 15-month deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom — the division's third rotation to Iraq since 2003 — about 4,000 Soldiers were waiting for the opportunity to acquire the requisite NCOES training for their ranks. Fort Carson, Colo., which received three 4ID brigade combat teams and the Ivy Division's headquarters in the summer of 2009, did not have an NCO academy for active-duty Soldiers and inherited the NCOES backlog.

With no specific guidance or mandates on how to correct the NCOES backlog, the division adopted an approach that effectively reduced the NCOES backlog while simultaneously maintaining readiness for deployment rotations.

As the brigades began planning for their fourth deployment,

division and Fort Carson leaders moved to establish the Army's first tri-component training academy.

The Ivy Division established this new NCO academy, hosting its first rotation of students in the Warrior Leader Course, the first level of education for junior sergeants, in October 2009. The branch-immaterial course provides basic leadership training that allows Soldiers in the ranks of private first class through staff sergeant the opportunity to acquire the skills, knowledge and experience needed to lead team- and squad-sized units.

Working with the 1st Battalion, 68th Regional Training Institute, Fort Carson leaders developed a plan to open the academy at initial operating capacity by October 2009. Instructors certified by the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy were identified from the active and reserve components to lead the course run by the academy. Command Sgt. Maj. Edward Macias was recommended by the Colorado National Guard to become the first commandant of the Fort Carson NCO Academy, assuming responsibility for allocating and funding the resources necessary to house and train junior NCOs.

Currently, the Fort Carson NCO Academy is the Army's only multicomponent WLC, teaching active-duty Soldiers, Reservists and National Guard members during each course cycle.

Initially, the school had a capacity to train 120 students per class because of limited classroom availability and housing, but Fort Carson rapidly allocated space to accommodate up to 200 Soldiers per course.

To augment the WLC classes, the 4th Infantry Division also coordinated with U.S. Forces Command to bring mobile training teams to train junior NCOs at their units. Synchronizing the BCT deployment cycle with the Army Forces Generation training cycle, BCTs began identifying Soldiers in need of basic NCO instruction and scheduled MTTs to match their units' redeployment and reset cycles. This maximized Soldiers' opportunities to attend school after returning from deployments or as their units prepared for the next mission.

While the Ivy Division and Fort Carson are making great strides reducing the NCOES backlog, the issue of Soldiers needing education while deployed must also remain a priority. In response, Fort Carson prioritized attendance at the school for redeploying units, allocating priority slots in the first four NCO



Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel A. Dailey



Photo by Sgt. Craig Cantrell

Spc. Phillip O'Brien of Company A, 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, pulls security during a Warrior Leader Course training exercise March 1 at Fort Carson, Colo.

Academy classes for NCOs promoted during their deployment.

Since adding more instructors to the academy and incorporating MTTs into the division, Fort Carson has graduated approximately 1,200 junior leaders through the NCOES classes. However, building a school, increasing the size of classes and surging MTTs to educate junior Soldiers was not enough to eliminate the backlog and concurrently provide training for newly promoted NCOs.

To tackle the problem, Fort Carson leadership had to take a hard look at the ranks, inspecting NCOs line by line to identify those who were deferred or denied training for being overweight or for having failed Army Physical Fitness Tests, or who were flagged due to discipline problems.

Maj. Gen. David G. Perkins, commanding general of the 4th Infantry Division and Fort Carson, implemented policies redefining NCO schools as nonnegotiable, no longer allowing Soldiers to defer NCO schools for just any reason, to include major unit exercises. Emergency leave and extreme hardship are the only deferments currently considered at Fort Carson. The new policy resulted in zero deferred slots in 2010.

Priority was also allocated to Soldiers leaving Fort Carson, so the departing NCOs would arrive at their next duty assignment current on all training requirements. The same priority was also given to Soldiers in-processing at Fort Carson.

Command also took advantage of open school slots at academies on other installations, sending Soldiers to Fort Hood, Texas, and Fort Campbell, Ky.

During the following year, the combined initiatives reduced the NCOES backlog at Fort Carson by an additional 1,000 Soldiers. Fort Carson's goal is to have the backlog reduction completed by the end of fiscal year 2011. Yet, because of the nature of deployments and continuing operations, there will likely remain a backlog of NCOs waiting to attend the next available course.

The challenge for leaders is to lean forward, remain proactive and maximize the available resources, identifying and prioritizing Soldiers before they deploy again.

Real-world experience is not a substitute for education. Not



Photo by Sgt. Craig Cantrell

Staff Sgt. Dennis Cline, a small group leader assigned to the 168th Regional Training Institute at Fort Carson, mentors a WLC student during the training exercise.

ensuring our future leaders get the proper NCOES schooling is detrimental to the NCO Corps and the U.S. Army. If we are not training our Soldiers, we are failing our Soldiers and the future of our Army.

Deployments build Soldiers' ability to train and lead, but Soldiers also need professional development — learning new doctrine and different tactics, techniques and procedures as taught at the academies. Our Soldiers need a balance between deployment experience and institutional knowledge.

The actions of the 4th Infantry Division and Fort Carson have set the standard in solving this complex and relevant problem facing today's NCOs. As leaders, we are not asking for a solution; we are committing the resources and the manpower to fix the problems ourselves. Boots-on-the-ground problems require boots-on-the-ground leadership.

Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel A. Dailey is the command sergeant major of the 4th Infantry Division and U.S. Division-North. He is currently deployed to Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq.