FULL-SPECTRUM BRAINPOWER

The new dimension of readiness

By Andrew S. Korim

"Soldier! You don't think! You do and die!"

Back in the spring of 1945, that's what draftees of 2nd Platoon, B Company, 213rd Infantry Replacement Training Battalion, at Camp Blanding, Fla., heard their platoon sergeant, Tech. Sgt. Hernandez, bellow in response to the explanation of "I thought ..." after a serious error in the execution of a task. Hernandez, a seasoned leader from the early days of the Pacific Campaign of World War II, was charged with training us for combat in Japan.

The personal, memorable lesson I learned from Sgt. Hernandez that day occurred when my mind failed me, and my arms inserted a defused training mortar shell in the mortar tube wrong end first. After I was corrected, Sgt. Hernandez ordered me to double-time around the training area for 10 minutes with my rifle (an 11-pound M1) extended over my head.

The pain in my arms and legs remains etched in my memory 66 years later. The lesson learned: Keep your mind focused on what you are doing. In those days, words similar to those of Lord Alfred Tennyson were drilled into the Soldier's mind with frequent chanting while on a march: "Ours is not to reason why. Ours is but to do and die."

In contrast, though not as rhythmic, the variable demands of the operational environment confronting NCOs today dictate a focus on reasoning and judicious discretion:

- Ours is to think critically, logically, analytically and creatively to gain pre-emptive or counteractive advantage over forthcoming events — whatever the mission and whatever the context may be.
- Ours is to apply knowledge, lessons learned, proficiencies and common sense to dominate, exploit or neutralize the challenges that come with perplexity, adversity and uncertainty.
- Ours is to continually gauge, size up and weigh the ebb and flow of the unique dynamics of each encounter to determine the optimal opportunity to execute decisive action.
- Ours is to reason how to achieve mission success, for those before us never settled for less.
- Ours, more than "theirs," is to be predisposed to a regimen of continuous learning to grow brainpower capabilities commensurate with the demands of full-spectrum operations.

How to achieve these NCO brainpower efficiencies becomes the issue.

Back in the 1940s and 1950s, typically the only source of education for noncommissioned officers was through basic training, occupational specialty schooling, field experience and the correspondence courses of the U.S. Armed Forces Institute. While in Japan during the spring of 1950 just before to North Korea's invasion of South Korea, the College Level Examination Program test was administered to those of us interested in attending college upon completion of our enlistments. Without doubt, a huge number of NCOs abandoned a career in the Army to take advantage of the educational opportunities made available to veterans under the GI Bill.

Though not comparable to commissioned officers' education and development, today's NCOs have many more opportunities to elevate their level of educational attainment beyond high school through the military's educational infrastructure and tuition assistance programs at civilian colleges.

With the Internet and technology like smartphones and tablets, the classroom can go to the NCO anywhere in the world instead of the NCO going to the classroom. The Internet offers NCOs deployed in remote locations the opportunity to reinforce ongoing experiential learning, Structured Self-Development and college coursework. With the culture of learning evolving within the NCO Corps, an NCO without an associate degree will soon become an obsolete leader. Indeed, obsolescence is not consistent with efficiency, success or survival.

Though self-development has historically been an off-duty,

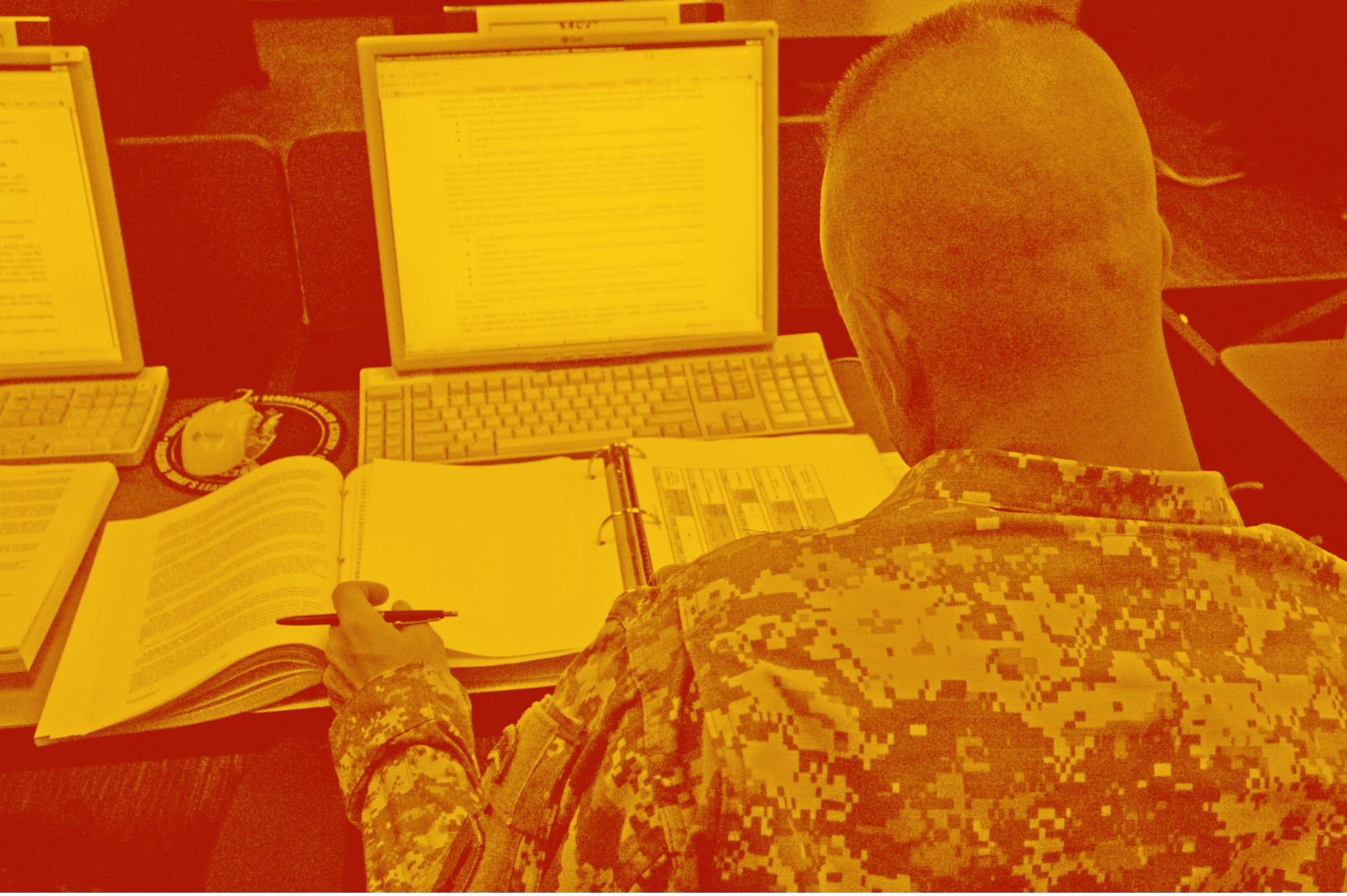

Photo illustration by Spc. David M. Gafford

personal educational activity, Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III significantly departed from this practice recently with a charge to all leaders: Dedicate time in the weekly schedule for individual Soldiers to work on their SSD courses. This departure from the past is another building block in the culture of learning that is evolving within the NCO Corps.

A predictable conclusion is that, in the coming decades, the NCO will be doing the heavy thinking that, in the past, was the turf of the educated officer corps. Building the NCO Corps' intellectual muscle and immunity to brain freeze will become *the* issue of the second decade of the 21st century.

In what should be viewed as a heads-up for the NCO Corps, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's command sergeant major, Command Sgt. Maj. David M. Bruner, offered an insightful perspective on brainpower and the distinctive roles of training and education in the Summer 2009 issue of *The NCO Journal*:

- "Leading requires a lot of brain power, a lot of will power and a lot of training and education."
- "The only factor that enables us to adapt, that is to pick and choose which habitual mental process to follow and which to override, is education. Training and drills enable us to react. Education enables us to adapt."
- "We as an NCO Corps must recognize that an adaptable leader's most important tool is his mind. PT is conducted every morning to keep in physical shape. We must exercise our minds as well."

These insights show the contrast in the roles of training and education, which are often erroneously treated as synonymous. Each maximize the utility of contrasting functions of the mind, namely the programmable automatic sensory reflex function, the training domain in which you act without thinking, and the intellectually demanding thoughtful discretionary function, the educational domain in which you think before acting.

To enhance understanding of the value of education as the expanded source of discretionary capabilities in NCO leader development, TRADOC clarifies the distinction between the role of education and the role of training in the report *Serving a Nation at War: A Campaign Quality Army with Joint and Expeditionary Capabilities*, prepared by TRADOC's Futures Center in 2004:

- "Just as training must reflect the hard certainties of the conflict before us, individual Soldier and leader education must address its uncertainties."
- "The need to teach Soldiers and leaders how to think rather than what to think has never been clearer. To defeat adaptive enemies, we must out-think them in order to out-fight them."

As Soldiers move from private first class up the NCO hierarchy, their span of responsibility and control over Soldiers and military assets naturally increases, as does the amount of brainpower needed to function effectively, efficiently and with the precision, confidence and authority of a leader.

To maximize individual NCO performance and the readiness capabilities of the NCO Corps, the accelerated and continuous

development of critical thinking, reasoning and discretionary deliberative capacities becomes a dominant priority.

Getting an education or acquiring functional brainpower assets is a cumulative learning process. This process consists of blending experiential learning, self-study and formal instruction with a focus on building an expansive bank of diverse knowledge, talents and know-how. The ingredients to accomplish this come from personal life experiences that include routine social interaction, curiosity about the dimensions of reality, work experiences, lessons learned from extraordinary occurrences and the study of the intellectual disciplines.

Parallel with and integral to building one's resource bank is developing one's proficiency in communication. This includes vocabulary mastery, orderly thought construction, reading comprehension, effective written and oral presentation, information management, precision in verbalization, and navigation of Internet resources. The capability to understand and exchange courtesies, intentions and commands in strategic foreign languages was advantageous to an NCO in the multinational environment of World War II, the Korean War and even more so in the contemporary multinational operational environment of Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the process of acquiring an education, reasoning and deliberative capabilities such as speculating, deducing, inferring, hypothesizing, imputing, analyzing, synthesizing, concluding, deciding and conceptualizing become a top priority for the NCO. Also developed are key functional mental transactions such as anticipation, correlation, inquisition, formulation, imagination, verification, evaluation, assimilation and introspection.

To be of prime value to the NCO as a leader of 21st-century warriors, education must be shaped to produce applied intellect. Specifically, learning must be consciously focused on acquiring performance capabilities essential to the efficient execution of the roles, responsibilities and duties of an NCO. Leader education has the burden to develop one's finesse in traversing the maze of problematic, destabilizing and unanticipated dimensions of each mission. Among the brain-powered navigational tools needed in such unchartered terrain are talents to continuously clarify, exploit, reconcile, mitigate, degrade and neutralize contingencies (often audaciously) as appropriate within the parameters of the rules of war.

In a world where continuous conflict, instability and strife are the harsh reality, and peace is an abstraction, the NCO's compelling obligation is full-spectrum operational readiness with brainpower being the catalytic asset that converts manpower, firepower and cyberpower into on-point customized modules of land power. In fact, had today's opportunities for an NCO to acquire a college education been available to me in 1950s, "U.S. Army Retired" would follow my name.

Andrew S. Korim, whose Army service spanned from 1945 to 1952, was a sergeant in the 181st Military Intelligence Detachment (Counterintelligence Corps), attached to the 1st Marine Division in Korea. Throughout his career, he was a major proponent of community colleges and NCO education. Now in his 80s, he is retired and lives in Sarver, Pa.

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civilian, wait until you see the enlightenment that can manifest itself in your youth when you invest in them the same time, determination and effort you did in-theater. If you are, or aspire to be, a commander or noncommissioned officer in this institution, the true reward of service in our Army is bringing out in our youth their potential. Don't get me wrong — this can and will be challenging and frustrating at times. But again, there is no greater reward. If you wanted to be a leader in this Army, you said, in effect, you wanted to be responsible for human life. If you thought otherwise, you thought wrong.

We are confronted with a convergence of two realities. We find our missions in two operational theaters either winding down, being scaled back or being handed off to the indigenous population, and we are confronted with a huge national debt that requires business as some have known it to change dramatically. Though there are challenges associated with both realities, there are opportunities as well.

There are things we've done throughout the Army's history that have stood us well in the past, prepared us for future conflict and will continue to do so in the more distant future. In-ranks inspections, in-quarters inspections, police call, etc., have instilled in us not only a sense of accountability, ownership, attention to detail and situational awareness but also an understanding of why pre-combat checks and inspections, though mundane, are critical to our success in combat. There are those things we've had to do to forecast training requirements, resource those requirements, and facilitate the training that have made us noncommissioned officers the envy of many nations' armies around the world.

Yes, the operations in a garrison environment can tax one's patience and, yes, there will be more folks competing for the same resources. However, there are ample opportunities to tax, test and build on the capacity of our youth, and they are infinitely more gratifying than what you have previously done.

Finally, while we are confronted with huge challenges, fiscally and contextually, this does not mean "end of mission." The mission does not end in the U.S. Army: We support and defend the Constitution, and that mission is enduring. The command is "change of mission." The challenge is a fundamentally different fiscal reality — a reality that many in our Army do not have much familiarity with because of wartime spending and force generation. But our youth, many of whom volunteered for service well after our sustained period of conflict began, have the strength and fortitude to live — and thrive — in this new reality.

If you share this perspective and commit to invest in our youth so that they may learn, develop and grow in this new reality, then thank you for your continued service. This is serious business and the American people deserve a serious, determined effort — one that will require unequivocal commitment from every Soldier and every Army civilian. The command has been given — and it is "change of mission."

Ciotola is the command sergeant major of the U.S. Installation Management Command at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Desiree N. Palacios

International military students receive an assignment from instructor Andrea Gjorevski during a general English class at the Defense Language Institute English Language Center at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

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watched the NBA since I was 5, but being in the arena was something totally different. We miss a lot on TV, so being in the arena was: oof, big time."

Othman has had several perspective-changing experiences during his time in the United States. He had never taught before, but after presentations in his classes and other public assignments arranged by the institute, he thinks he's uncovered a real knack for it; now, he's eager to get back to Lebanon and begin his new teaching career in his army.

During his time at the institute, he's developed relationships with other students and now counts among his friends soldiers from Japan, Africa, the Middle East, Korea, Cambodia and a host of other countries. A trip to an elementary school in San Antonio led to one of his most touching experiences, when the children he spoke to wrote to him months later and remembered everything he told them about himself and his country. And Othman has learned something about American Soldiers.

"When I first came here, one of my first assignments was to pick a book. So I picked a book about PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder," he said. "This book gave me a lot of information about the American Soldier, because in the media, in our media, it's manipulated. In my country, or in the Middle East, they always see the American Soldier as an invader to some extent. But I know — even before reading this book, but this book fossilized this in my mind — that the American Soldier is just a human being like us. He has orders to do, and he has problems to face. And when he comes back home, he has a mother, children, a wife to take care of. It gave me a lot of an idea about the American Soldier as a human. I'm not seeing him as an enemy. Maybe because it's politics, but in the end we are not politicians. We're just human beings in the end, and we're soldiers."

Robert Smith, a supervisor for one of the DLIELC's branches, thinks that sort of insight is one of the most important goals of the work done at the institute. He spent four years enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and then 18 in the U.S. Army. Since retiring, he has spent the past 17 years working for the DLIELC, almost half of that time overseas. He recently took on a supervisory role in the institute's Specialized English Branch, which prepares students with some English skills to move onto Sspecialized military training at follow-on sites across the United States.

"Their learning English and then coming here for training or getting training from military forces overseas builds a level of cooperation that, as far as I'm concerned, does more to maintain peace than almost anything else we do," Smith said. "We're teaching them to cooperate with us, but it doesn't just work like that. Once they have a language in common, English, they can cooperate with other countries where we've also trained soldiers. So it gives them a linguistics bridge that didn't exist before. I really think we're a major contributor to world peace."

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