

Growing Talent in Tactical Sustainment Leaders

■ By Maj. Gen. Paul C. Hurley Jr.



Fort Lee is working to provide the Army with smart, resilient sustainment leaders who are well-equipped to confront today's challenges.

Forbes magazine recently ranked the fastest growing career fields in the United States. The list includes careers in optometry, physical therapy, genetic counseling, and wind turbine services.

Unfortunately, platoon leader did not make the list, and neither did team leader, supply sergeant, support operations officer, or command sergeant major. The Army does not use job fairs, headhunters, or Monster.com to fill our critical positions. As Gen. Eric Shinseki famously observed, “We don’t hire out. We grow our own leaders.”

In the Army, leader development is a deadly serious business. The Army routinely asks our leaders to make life and death decisions, and we measure our bottom line in blood, sweat, and tears, not market share and profit margins.

The increased possibility that the Army will fight a large-scale combat operation in the near future makes the leader development process more important than ever. U.S. armed forces spent the past two decades waging difficult campaigns against terrorist organizations. Meanwhile, our adversaries grew in size and strength, developing new capabilities that will make future conflicts faster, deadlier, and more unpredictable. To survive and win in this environment, the next generation of tactical sustainment leaders needs to be smarter, tougher, and more adaptive than ever before.

Institutional Training

At Fort Lee, Virginia, we are working full time to develop the next generation of Army sustainment leaders. Each year, the Army Logistics University (ALU) trains more than

20,000 students physically, mentally, and professionally in order to build the competence and confidence necessary to lead America’s sons and daughters into battle.

The Combined Arms Support Command’s Sustainment Leader Development Implementation Plan identifies the ends, ways, and means to develop future leaders. It can be accessed here: http://www.cascom.army.mil/g_staff/g3/SUOS/site-sustainment/pages/leadership.htm. This work does not happen in a vacuum. As the battlefield changes, so do our programs.

The most noticeable change in our curriculum is more rigor. Across the university, instructors now challenge students daily to achieve excellence. In the near future, for example, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) attending the Senior Leader Course will write papers, execute the military decisionmaking process, and prepare and brief a variety of staff products. These assignments will receive a letter grade instead of the old “go/no-go” evaluation. Beginning this fall, sergeants who fail to meet the standards for effective communication will attend remedial training.

At the Basic Officer Leader Courses (BOLCs), new officers are being taught how to think and perform as junior leaders while simultaneously being equipped with an academic foundation for all areas of logistics: supply, maintenance, and transportation. To develop students’ critical thinking, BOLC examinations now ask questions based on specific tactical scenarios rather than generic situations. Most importantly, to better cultivate their field craft and resilience, each lieutenant at BOLC now

spends at least three weeks training in the field.

The Logistics Captains Career Course has recently implemented a capstone individual assessment. Each student now prepares and briefs a concept of support worth 20 percent of the course grade. During exam week, the ALU lights burn bright into the evening, with classrooms full of captains scrambling to complete their analyses. In the morning, these same students line the hallways as they make last-minute preparations while waiting to brief the evaluation board.

In addition to the increased academic rigor, professional military education is becoming more relevant. Because the challenges of large-scale combat differ greatly from those of stability and counterinsurgency operations, ALU is re-examining sustainment curriculum across the board to ensure emerging leaders gain the knowledge and skills neces-

sary to survive and win in large-scale combat.

At the Technical Logistics College, for example, the Training and Doctrine Command G-2 recently briefed the faculty on emerging threats and changes to the operational environment. In turn, instructors will apply these concepts to classroom discussions on topics such as strategic overmatch and property accountability on extended battlefields.

As part of a larger initiative across the Training and Doctrine Command, Soldiers at every rank from private to general officer are seeing more discussion of large-scale combat operations in every lesson plan. At the Command and General Staff College, faculty members are adjusting the curriculum to focus on the Army's readiness to sustain decisive action. Changes will include more integration of logistics capabilities and limitations across warfighting functions and a renewed focus on

supporting division- and corps-level operations.

ALU is continuing its ongoing shift toward a multifunctional culture. This effort does not seek to diminish the pride that students have in their basic branches. Nevertheless, our previous focus on functional training, especially among junior officers, failed to prepare them for service in an Army that assigns logisticians where they are needed, regardless of functional competency. BOLC will pilot a multifunctional approach later this year in which officers from all three branches receive exactly the same instruction.

Operational Experience

As I mentioned, we are building better tactical leaders every day, but the institutional training and education that we provide is only a part of their leader development. Operational assignments offer the most valuable training that our Soldiers



Second Lt. Stewart Tarp, a Transportation Basic Officer Leader Course student, mans a machine gun mounted on a Humvee during the Operation Overland exercise at Fort Pickett, Va., on Sept. 7, 2017. (Photo by Terrance Bell)



Staff Sgt. Christopher Penley, a combatives instructor, leads an after-action review following a training scenario. (Photo by Terrence Bell)

receive. During these assignments, young officers and sergeants deploy to training centers and combat zones, endure stress, failure, and hardship, solve real-world challenges, and learn the lessons that come only from being in charge.

I encourage each of you to get the most out of each duty assignment. Whether you love or hate your current job, it will not last forever. In many cases, it won't last even 12 months. Therefore, do your best and learn what you can while you are there.

If you are lucky enough to be leading these young men and women, consider this article a friendly reminder that you are training your replacements. To that end, you need to set and enforce high standards, you need to lead by example, and you need to challenge your junior leaders with developmental assignments and opportunities that will enable them to learn and grow.

Just as important, you need to make the most of every training event. As a leader, you are responsible for planning, resourcing, and executing every field exercise, every road march, and every NCO professional devel-

opment session in accordance with Army standards. If you make this a priority, your unit will get more out of each training event and you will teach your Soldiers what right looks like. They learn from everything you say, everything you do, and everything you let go.

Self-Development

Finally, I want to remind all Soldiers reading this article to invest in themselves. The Army provides a myriad of organizations and resources to optimize your development in the institutional and operational training domains, but the Army's third training domain, self-development, needs no external agencies. The resources in this domain simply require Soldiers with energy, ambition, and patience to take responsibility for their own growth.

Most Soldiers are already familiar with the online resources available through the Army Learning Management System, Joint Knowledge Online, and the Sustainment Unit One Stop. Going over and above these opportunities, the Army has programs available to provide Sol-

diers with undergraduate and graduate degrees, including college credits for courses taken as part of a Soldier's professional military education.

In addition, Army partnerships with various colleges and universities allow officers and NCOs to earn degrees in supply chain management and business administration. If you really want to get a jump on the future, consider the field of predictive intelligence and data analytics. As we rely more on data analysis to anticipate logistics requirements in the coming years, we will need far more data scientists to translate that data into battlefield effects.

The Army's need for greater depth of knowledge at every echelon keeps me awake at night. In the next war, lives will depend on the ability of sustainment leaders to make more decisions at a much higher velocity and in a significantly more difficult environment than we have ever experienced before.

This emphasis on leader development probably sounds familiar. The challenges of large-scale combat operations resemble the Army's Cold War emphasis on AirLand Battle. Unfortunately, we no longer enjoy massive technical advantages over adversaries who challenge us across multiple domains, including space and cyberspace.

To confront those challenges, we need smart, tough, resilient sustainment leaders. They must be technical experts on the systems and processes that support the force, and they must know their business as Soldiers.

We are growing those leaders every day, not only at Fort Lee but across the Army. I need your help to ensure they receive the feedback, assignments, and opportunities necessary to win the next war.

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