Warrant Officer Professional Development: An I Corps Perspective

By Chief Warrant Officer 5 Christopher A. Ferguson

The I Corps G–4 at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), Washington, hosted the inaugural JBLM Sustainment Warrant Officer Conference on 30 November 2011. The conference was established as a prelude to a more structured and enduring approach to leader development with an emphasis on warrant officer professional development (WOPD). This approach to leader development is based on Army Regulation 350–1, Army Training and Leader Development; the Forces Command (FORSCOM) Campaign Plan 2011–2015; and I Corps Operation Order 241–11, I Corps ARFORGEN [Army Force Generation] Cycle Training Guidance 2012–2013.

The purpose of the conference was to facilitate the FORSCOM and I Corps commanders' leader development guidance with a line of effort on warrant officer mentorship and professional development. The G–4 sponsored this conference to launch its campaign on WOPD as an enabler for the Department of the Army and FORSCOM "Back to Basics" initiative and to meet the Army Campaign Plan intent for full-spectrum operations.

The agenda was built around a broad spectrum of subjects that were relevant to a multicomponent audience. The 286 attendees included Washington and Oregon Army National Guard members and Active and Reserve component members.

Guest speakers included senior warrant officer leaders from across the Army: the Senior Warrant Officer Advisory Council to the Army Chief of Staff, the senior warrant officer adviser to the Combined Arms Center commander, the deputy commandant for the Warrant Officer Career College, regimental chief warrant officers from various proponents, and various branch representatives from Human Resources Command.

Attendees indicated that this was a successful event and should serve as the template for similar WOPD forums across the Army.

WOPD Challenges

More than 450 warrant officers at JBLM are assigned to FORSCOM units subordinate to the I Corps, and an additional 250 are assigned to tenant units across JBLM. Many of these warrant officers find themselves in increasingly isolated environments as a result of—

- Modularity, which has created a more brigade centric Army.
- The ARFORGEN model, which generates frequent modular unit deployments.
- Low density career management fields, which further restrict the exposure of junior warrant officers to their counterparts.

These three dynamics potentially affect the technical and leader development of individual warrant officers who are assigned to any given unit for an extended time. See chart on page 14.

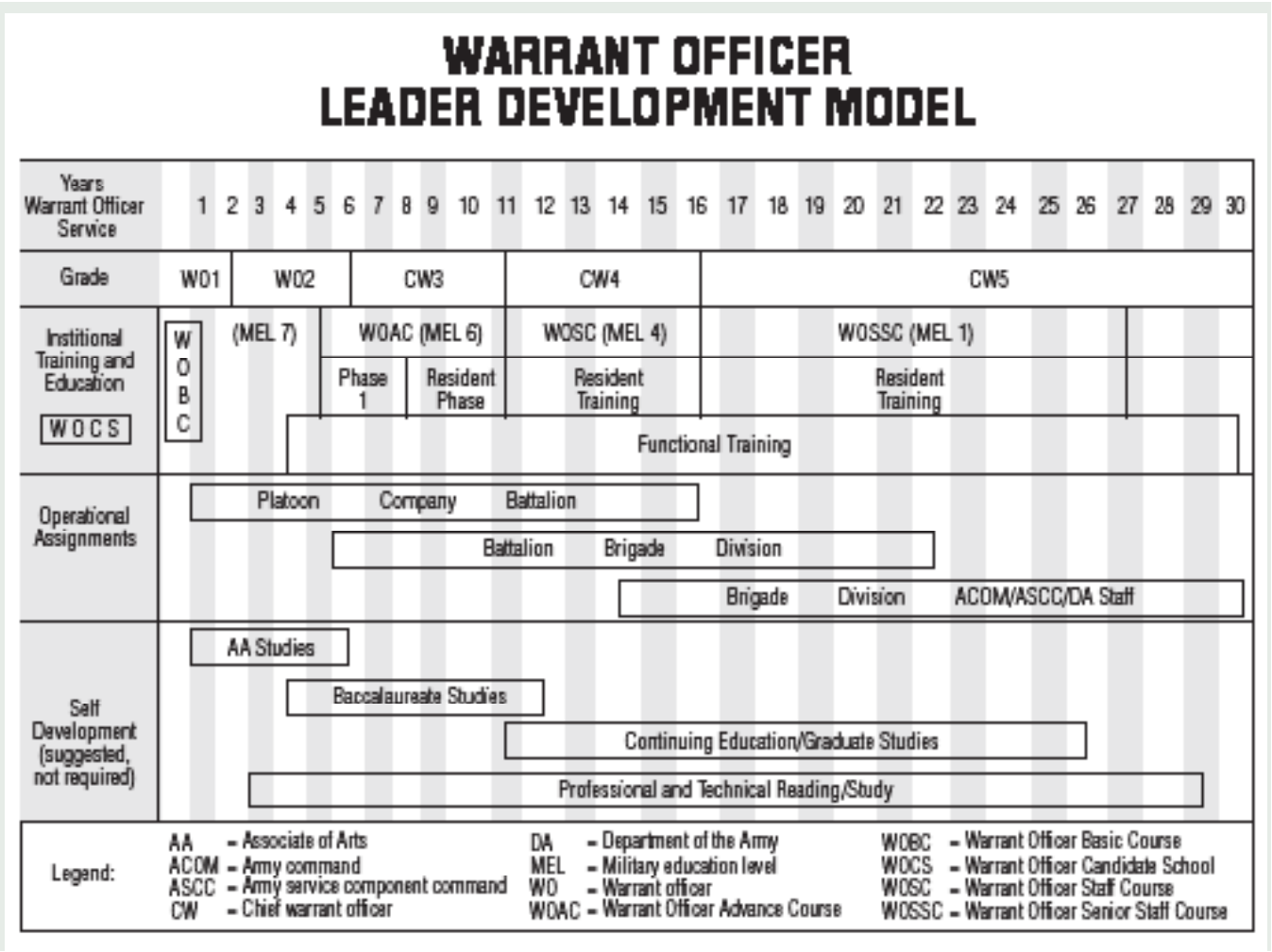
> Senior warrant officers typically have supported a wide range of Army missions throughout their careers.

Warrant officers are inherently in low-density technical career fields. Total warrant officer strength is less than 1 percent of the entire Army, and that ratio is proportionately smaller within unit formations.

Upon promotion to chief warrant officer 2, warrant officers take an oath of commission and are consequently managed with the rest of the commissioned officer population with regard to unit-level training. The current doctrinal guidance for leader training and development within tactical units typically establishes separate lines of effort on enlisted and officer development. Although the role of the warrant officer has evolved into a more multifunctional leader-Soldier-technician-adviser, the Army warrant officer remains primarily an adaptive technical expert and requires targeted technical development in addition to regular officer leader training.

Warrant Officer Assignments

A typical Stryker brigade combat team (SBCT) of 4,000 Soldiers is authorized 40 warrant officers, of which only 1 is authorized in military occupational specialty (MOS) 920A (property book officer), 1 in



Warrant officers have a defined progression that is based on their training, education, experience, and time as a warrant officer.

MOS 882A (mobility officer), and 1 in MOS 420A (personnel technician). Fifteen other MOSs also are authorized only one warrant officer per SBCT. Some of these mission-essential MOS positions are assigned to the brigade headquarters, but sustainment warrant officers are mostly assigned to the brigade support battalion.

These warrant officer authorizations are typically chief warrant officer 2 positions that are often filled by warrant officer 1s. The most senior warrant officer in an SBCT is normally a chief warrant officer 4 MOS 915A (maintenance technician) who is assigned to the brigade support battalion. More senior warrant officer positions are authorized for installations with a division or corps headquarters.

Technical Expertise

Senior warrant officers typically have supported a wide range of Army missions throughout their careers. Warrant officers in the Army have specific levels of technical ability. They refine their technical expertise and develop their leader and management skills through tiered progressive assignments and education.

Any effective technical development program requires vertical and lateral networking and mentoring to efficiently attain progressive levels of expertise. Senior warrant officers at every level of the organization must take ownership of WOPD to create a conduit for exposing both junior and senior warrants to all of the available resources and technical knowledge. Department of Defense supporting agencies, the Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), and other commands are equally viable resources for expanding the warrant officer knowledge base.

Senior Warrant Officer Advisory Council

The senior warrant officer at the highest command level should establish a council of senior warrant officers from subordinate units to develop programs that are synchronized and support the commander's overarching leader development and training guidance. The key components of these programs should include

training, mentoring, and networking. The Senior Warrant Officer Advisory Council serves as an excellent model for division- and corps-level councils.

The senior warrant officer at each installation should be responsible for advising the senior commander on talent management and career development assignments for all warrant officers in the command. He should also be responsible for facilitating a council of senior warrant officers from each subordinate brigade-level command. The mission of that council should be to advise, manage, and make recommendations to commanders on career development assignments for all warrant officers. This program should be formalized by a published operation order and be integrated into each commander's leader development and training program.

Army Leader Development Program

The Army Leader Development Program (ALDP) merged existing Army leader development (LD) initiatives into a single program. ALDP was established in 2007 by the Army Chief of Staff.

The Quarterly Leader Development Review (QLDR) is a body of senior Army leaders that focuses on the formal execution of approved Army LD programs. QLDR provides supporting commands and lead agents the opportunity to collectively address ALDP issues. ALDP serves as the main platform for integrating WOPD initiatives into TRADOC-supported programs such as professional military education (PME) and the Warrant Officer Education System (WOES).

Throughout a normal 20-year career cycle, a warrant officer will have the opportunity to spend no more than a cumulative 18 to 24 months in a TRADOC training environment for PME and WOES. Most of these formal training opportunities occur upon initial entry, and progressive training occurs at varying intervals of career progression. Since career progression predominantly occurs in an operational environment, a formal decentralized program similar to the key developmental management of field-grade officers as outlined in Department of the Army Pamphlet 600–3, Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management, is needed.

Improving Warrant Officer Assignments

Because warrant officers gain their technical experience through progressive assignments and training while assigned to operational commands, it is important for assignments to be managed at the installation level. This ensures that the right talent is being used in the appropriate positions so that individuals gain experience. This approach will create broadening job opportunities as each warrant officer develops his skills.

The Human Resources Command's new policy of decentralizing pinpoint assignments commits newly assigned warrant officers to specific unit identification codes. Company and field grade officers are assigned in a similar manner; however, after 1 year in a position or based on the internal operational needs of that installation, each subsequent duty position for that officer is managed internally by the commander. Company and field grade officers who are on a 36-month tour of duty typically have the opportunity to serve in three different duty positions, each for a 12-month period. This rotation of job positions is crucial to diversifying each officer's knowledge base.

Although warrant officers are single-track officers, a similar approach of managing individual talents should be employed at the installation level. If a warrant officer is assigned by the Human Resources Command to a BCT and remains in that same position for 36 to 48 months, his exposure to new challenges is usually limited. This significantly restricts that officer's technical development. Likewise, if a warrant officer is initially assigned to a BCT as a warrant officer 1 and remains in the same position for a 36 to 48 month period, he will essentially have an additional 2 years before being eligible for promotion to chief warrant officer 3. However, he will not have gained the broadening exposure necessary to develop the skills needed to perform as a fully qualified chief warrant officer 3.

To optimize the technical development of warrant officers, a talent management program must be in place at each installation to ensure that each officer is afforded the opportunity for at least one progressive assignment change during a 36 to 48 months tour. Each command should use its senior warrant officer to create a talent management program that best fits the operational needs of the broader installation.

This process should be formalized similar to the management of the field-grade promotion slate or the company-grade order-of-merit list. The success of the warrant officer development program will ultimately mandate that warrant officers take ownership of their own professional development in order to remain relevant and credible to the Army mission as the overall environment transitions to full-spectrum operations.

Chief Warrant Officer 5 Christopher A. Ferguson is the senior supply systems technician for the I Corps G–4 at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington. He wrote this article as part of an initiative to promote formalized warrant officer professional development at the installation level. He holds a bachelor's degree in business management from the University of Maryland and a master's degree in logistics management from the Florida Institute of Technology. He is a graduate of the Army Logistics Management College's Logistics Executive Development Course.