

STATEMENT BY

MR. JOHN D. SPARKS

DIRECTOR,

INSTITUTE FOR NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BEFORE

OVERSIGHT & INVESTIGATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SECOND SESSION, 111TH CONGRESS

JULY 28, 2010

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

UNTIL RELEASED BY

THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

Chairman Snyder, Congressman Wittman and the honorable members of the House Armed Services Oversight and Investigations Sub-Committee, I am Command Sergeant Major (CSM) (retired) John Sparks Director, Institute for Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Fort Monroe, Virginia. On behalf of General Marty Dempsey, Commanding General, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about our Army's enlisted professional military education. As the Director, Institute for Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development (INCOPD), I am responsible for providing the direction and oversight of the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) across the Army and have been directly involved in the transition of NCOES. As the principal advisor to the Army Leader Development Enterprise on Non-Commissioned Officer development, I am responsible for the integration of all actions and activities related to NCO Leader Development into the Army Leader Development Strategy and serve as the NCO subject matter expert for the Army Leader Development Enterprise. I retired as the Command Sergeant Major of TRADOC after thirty years of service and have attended all levels of the NCOES. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the Army's Noncommissioned Officer Education System and Professional Military Education program.

Over the course of the last 18 months, the Army has embarked on a campaign of learning which has informed and shaped leader development as we know it today. On November 25th, 2009, the Chief of Staff of the Army approved the Army Leader Development Strategy. General Dempsey has vested in me the responsibility for our Army's leader development efforts for the NCO cohort.

The committee has asked for an overview of Enlisted Professional Military Education (EPME). The Army views EPME as a subset of a larger system we call the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES). It is important to make this distinction because the Army views education as holistic, sequential and progressive. The reason for this is simple – the Army Leader Development Strategy for a 21st Century Army requires a balanced commitment to the three pillars of leader development: training, education, and experience. Leader development, whether in the officer, enlisted or civilian community, is a function of a career-long education process complemented and enhanced by training and experience. While today’s hearing will only examine the role of EPME, it is critical to understand the symbiotic relationship between education, training and experience as a function of leadership development. This testimony is structured into four parts: (1) purpose, mission and organizational construct of Army NCOES; (2) Army Policy Framework and the EPME continuum; (3) program assessment and NCO cohort initiatives; (4) the future learning environment and challenges to EPME.

The institutional Army has adapted to meet the requirements of theater commanders and operational commanders. In doing so, we have changed the manner in which we are organized and coordinated. As the lead agent for Leader Development, General Dempsey has emphasized the significance of EPME by creating the Institute of Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development (INCOPD). This special activity reports directly to the TRADOC Headquarters and serves as the NCO cohort lead responsible for coordinating vertically and horizontally across the Army, Army Reserves and National Guard on leader development requirements, strategy and policies within the NCO community. With the United States Sergeants Major Academy aligned directly under it, INCOPD is the Army lead for all NCO cohort initiatives and carries out similar

functions as the United States War College, Command and General Staff College and Combined Arms Command in terms of professional military education advocacy and oversight.

NCOES and EPME has transformed significantly since its creation in 1972. In its early years, EPME was characterized as a singularly focused, schoolhouse delivered training program. Today, EPME focuses on balancing training, education and experience and is designed to deliver tiered and progressive education opportunities throughout the career path of a NCO. In 1972, the Army delivered NCO training to approximately 299 Soldiers – today the Army delivers professional military education to approximately 163,076 NCOs annually. The United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, acknowledged as the premier noncommissioned officer education institution in the world, has graduated 526 Soldiers from 63 countries. As I hope you will agree, the Army’s system for NCO education has evolved considerably. Its purpose today is to serve as a progressive and sequential, leader, technical and tactical training/education system that provides NCOs the skills relevant to the duties, responsibilities, and missions they will perform. The goal of NCOES is to prepare NCOs to lead and train Soldiers who work and fight under their supervision, and to assist their leaders to execute the mission. INCOPD serves as the primary enabler for NCOES. As such, the INCOPD is chartered to carry out three very important functions: (1) provide direction and oversight of the NCOES across the Army; (2) integrate all actions and activities related to NCO Leader Development into the Army Leader Development Strategy; and (3) serve as the NCO subject matter expert for the Army Leader Development Enterprise.

The Army’s PME approach must also account for personnel management policies and is endeavoring to synchronize these policies with educational changes in our leader development. General Dempsey is synchronizing efforts for Army leader development. U.S. Army Training

and Doctrine Command will pursue adaptations to Army policies and programs needed to build greater flexibility and predictability within the Army. These efforts will result in a more inclusive and holistic approach that will facilitate more efficient and effective use of resources and deliver leaders who are better prepared to lead our Army. We're shaping the future of our PME system to better develop the leader characteristics our Expeditionary Army requires of its force to execute Full-Spectrum Operations in an era of persistent conflict.

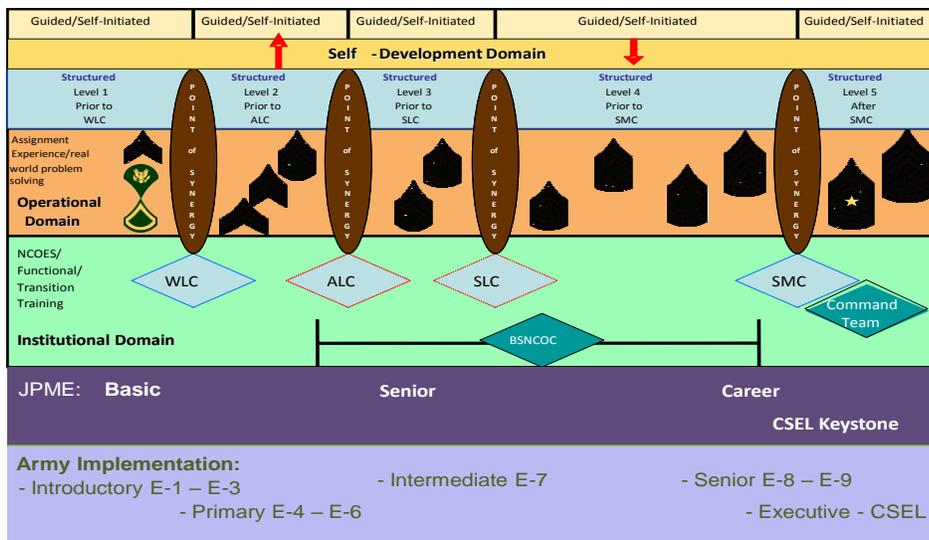
An overview of the purpose, mission and NCOES organizational construct paves the way for a discussion about Army policy framework and the EPME continuum. The policy framework and authorities that form the basis of the Army's system of professional military education is established through several statutory and regulatory documents. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 1805.01, *Enlisted Professional Military Education Policy*, implements our US Code Title 10 responsibilities, Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development*, establishes professional military education requirements across the Army and Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-25 - US Army Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Guide, and describes progressive career requirements. Other key and influential documents include the Army Capstone Concept (TP 525-3-0), Field Manual 3-0 (Full Spectrum Operations), the Army Training Concept, the Army Training and Leader Development Guidance, Army Learning Concept, and the Army Leader Development Strategy. While this testimony is not designed to cover this framework in depth, it is important to be aware of the nucleus around which PME revolves.

The growth and development of a successful military leader is achieved through a deliberate and balanced leader development approach of education, training, and experience. We train leaders and Soldiers to accomplish the tasks that we know are a part of defending our

Nation, and we educate them to succeed in the complexity of the contemporary operating environment against hybrid threats. Additionally, we must prepare Soldiers for the next challenge. Our professional military education framework is designed to prepare NCO's to effectively operate in a security environment characterized by growing complexity, ill-structured problems, and decentralized operations.

NCO Leader Development - EPME

Three linked/synchronized domains.



The graphic above will help you understand how the Army approaches leader development. This chart outlines the lifespan of the typical Army NCO career; displaying ranks achieved, schools attended, and institutional training/educational outcomes required. The orange areas of the diagram are of great importance in this depiction of the NCOs development continuum because they represent the Soldiers' working experiences. While the educational opportunities associated with a career are easily mapped, the experience gained over time is more variable, depending on decisions made along the timeline. The educational opportunities displayed as green boxes appear as discrete blocks, but in reality they represent a continuum of

education that is part of an overall developmental process. Each block must build on the education and experience that preceded it. Each discrete course also must take into account the experience and education that will follow. In order to gain a deeper appreciation of the content and scope of tasks/competencies offered at each level, allow me to briefly describe the progression of each course along the EPME continuum.

EPME is designed to build on Soldiers' combat experience and focus on skills such as analytical thinking in operational situations. The goal is to develop broadly-skilled noncommissioned officers who are critical thinkers, resource managers and creative leaders. In a sharp change from previous training programs that typically required 14 months of resident schooling over a 20 to 30 year career, the new regimen is continuous and includes a range of resident and distance-learning courses. It starts when a Soldier completes initial entry training and participates in a Web-based Structured Self-Development program; it continues with an iterative construct of EPME courses that progressively builds upon education, experience and training. Structured Self Development is a new program that will begin this year and includes blocks of web-based instruction throughout a Soldier's career.

The first block in a NCO's career is the Warrior Leader Course (WLC). The course will prepare Soldiers to serve as team leaders and squad leaders and will focus on leadership competencies and creative thinking skills. It will continue to be a requirement for promotion to staff sergeant. Students typically will have two to four years of service, and will be in the ranks of private first class through sergeant. The revision shrinks emphasis on battle drills and other tactical exercises and puts greater emphasis on topics designed to build leadership skills and self-confidence. Learning objectives are expected to focus on development of a cohesive team, ethical decision-making, squad-level maintenance, training and leading a squad, casualty

evacuation, and squad tactical operations. In 2008, TRADOC began to train this course by means of a Mobile Training Team (MTT) at locations which did not have a resident WLC course but had a high number of Soldiers requiring this foundational leadership course who often received this course in a Temporary Duty Status (away from their assigned location. Since this initiative began, 1,739 Soldiers received this foundational leadership course via MTT.

Building on that foundation, Soldiers at the sergeant to staff sergeant (E5-E6) levels will attend the Advance Leaders Course (ALC) which is designed to provide the tools necessary to lead at the next level of responsibility the platoon-level. Soldiers will typically have six to eight years of service. The common core phase, was previously delivered by video teleconferencing or resident instruction, but is now mainly facilitated via Web-based instruction with an instructor assigned to a student population. Nearly 14,000 active-component Soldiers are currently taking the Web-based course during the fiscal year that started October 2009. Another 17,000 Soldiers from the National Guard and Army Reserve will be brought under the system in FY 2011-12. We revised the previous Basic NCO Course (BNCOC), the focus of the new course shifted one level up the leadership chain, and include instruction on platoon and squad-level operations. As the Advanced Leaders Course, it will continue to have a specialty phase delivered by military occupational specialty proponents and branch service schools. The length of the specialty phase will vary between branches, but will not exceed eight weeks. In support of current combat operations, the Army identified 20 Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) which have an increased deployment rate resulting in a significant number of NCO's who have been unable to attend their resident ALC course. In accordance with General Casey's guidance to pursue increased Home Station training venues, TRADOC, in concert with FORSCOM, developed and launched ALC MTTs. Since the inception of this program in 2004, 455 courses have been

conducted, training 13,351 NCOs at home station, ultimately keeping the NCO with their families.

Soldiers at the sergeant first class (E-7) level, with roughly 12 to 14 years of service will attend the Senior Leaders Course (SLC). The focus of learning at this level will be on platoon and company level operations. Some of the common core elements of the course will address dealing with family violence and conflict management, ethics and solving complex problems, developing subordinate leaders, Soldier rights, managing company training, mortuary affairs, preventive medicine and casualty evacuation. Students typically are sergeants first class and promotable staff sergeants. The SLC will remain a specialty-specific learning course of up to eight weeks that is required for promotion to master sergeant.

Some of the most significant changes to NCO PME have taken place at the Sergeants Major Academy. The Sergeants Major Course was overhauled and upgraded to include topics that field-grade officers study at the Command and General Staff College. The resident and nonresident Sergeants Major Courses will have similar content to the Intermediate Level Education courses attended by captains and majors, but will be designed to prepare our most senior NCOs to serve primarily at the Battalion and Brigade levels. The goal of redesign is not to make senior noncommissioned officers more like officers, but to have them play a greater role in the process of planning and executing operations. To that end, the current course of instruction includes several modules devoted to issues taught at CGSC. Moreover, the Academy no longer administers objective tests with multiple choice answers; rather, it will require use of the progressive and sequential training, education and experience Soldiers have gained, to develop comprehensive solutions that are doctrinally accurate.

Realizing that today's operating environment requires Soldiers to not only function, but partner with our Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational (JIIM) teammates, I would be remiss if I did not discuss the joint aspect of Army EPME. Soldiers are exposed to joint education throughout the continuum of professional development starting with an introductory block of instruction at the beginning of their service. In addition to the self-development and resident instruction at the senior and Executive levels, Soldiers receive assignment-oriented training prior to assignment to joint positions at the sergeant through sergeant major levels.

In short, EPME has transformed considerably in order to provide NCOs the flexibility to attend and complete PME at more beneficial times and locations by leveraging advanced technologies, distance learning, mobile training and structured self development programs. Use of web-based applications, curricula changes, and increased use of innovative technologies and learning concepts have facilitated shorter resident courses affording more NCOs the opportunity to attend EPME. TRADOC NCO Academies teaching courses longer than eight weeks in length that are not suitable for delivery via a MTT, are also using a six-day work week.

Effective change and adaptation can only occur through deliberate and periodic assessment and evaluation. We must continuously review our NCO professional military education to ensure it remains relevant to our force and national needs. The strategic environment is growing more complex, increasing the educational requirements necessary for innovative and dynamic leader development. Our implementation of recommendations stems from a long series of introspective examinations of leader development requirements and gap analysis, the Army Training and Leader Development Panels from 2000-2004, and the current

Army Training and Leader Development Program. These functions and programs are indicative of how valuable professional military education is to Army leader development.

This brings me to my third point of discussion which is assessment and evaluation of PME system performance. Guidance contained in Training and Doctrine Command Regulations specify the means by which the Army evaluates its professional military education system performance. Comprehensive in nature, these documents are also under revision to align with current operational requirements. Among the processes and indicators used to measure performance of EPME is the Army Quality Assurance Program for training and education, established in 2002. Its purpose is to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of institutional training and education. In addition to this institutionalized program for evaluation, I would also like to highlight three additional assessment tools to assist INCOPD in evaluating current capabilities against future requirements.

First, the Army is conducting an assessment of CONUS based Warrior Leader Course NCO Academies to improve resource management and improve facilities. The goal of this assessment is to provide recommendations to Headquarters, Department of the Army to achieve economies of scale, align school missions to the right organization, ensure consistent standards, and improve resource management using three specific criteria, training requirement, facilities, resources, and command and control. Ultimately, these recommendations will be provided to Army leadership upon completion of the review.

Second, INCOPD is currently conducting a two-phase needs analysis to identify the gap between current NCOES learning practices and evidence-based best practices. The objective of Phase One (completed in November 2009) was to determine if powerful, evidence-based

learning practices were being used in NCO courses. For this reason, we collected and evaluated samples of courseware and administered an electronic survey to our TRADOC NCO Academies and Schools. Phase Two was designed to identify root causes that prevent us from using evidence-based learning practices in NCO courses. To effectively conduct this gap analysis, INCOPD visited a sample of eight NCO Academies to observe instruction and interview trainers and training managers. From the needs analysis data we will be developing recommendations for improving the quality of NCOES.

Third, we've employed external evaluation resources to assess and evaluate the feasibility of establishing Army multi-component NCO academies throughout the contiguous US and overseas. The intent behind chartering this study is threefold: (1) examine the feasibility, benefits, limitations, and cost-effectiveness of creating multi-component Non-Commissioned Officer Academies (NCOAs) throughout the Army to conduct the Warrior Leader Course (WLC); (2) provide recommendations on the best method to develop and assess options for implementing a multi-component organizational structure to align to WLC student loads; and (3) assess the implications for NCOES more broadly.

Continuous assessment internal and external to the organization, analysis of best practices and development and refinement of deliberate and comprehensive policy framework renders the development of key initiatives to further shape and enhance the PME. Recommended changes to professional military education begin with this command. The Army Leader Development Strategy provides further rigor to this process by providing the strategic vision that will inform implementation plans and drive professional military education initiatives for Army level consideration. While I could write volumes about the initiatives we have ongoing in the EPME, I

would like to highlight several that underscore the Army's forwarding-leaning posture with regard to leader development.

The One Army School System is one such initiative designed to enhance the Institutional Army's support of the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) model. The current initiative at Fort Carson, CO will lead to a multi-component NCO Academy Table of Allowances and changes to WLC regionalization and distribution policies, which will accomplish the following:

- Streamline WLC student throughput.
- Gain training efficiencies in the planning and conduct of WLC throughout the Army.
- Achieve standardization of NCO Academy force structure throughout the Army.

Upon full implementation, the One Army School System will provide increased training and education by leveraging the available resources of all three Army Components and establish multi-component facilities to train future warriors.

Creating academic opportunities to reinforce training and provide theoretical structure are central to developing an environment where life-long learning is valued. The Army's College of the American Soldier is another initiative that supports this concept. This program is an enduring training and education initiative between Army trainers and civilian educators focused on expanding existing civilian education support for our Soldiers and leaders; an optimum balance of training and education that accelerates the development of adaptive, broadly-skilled NCO leaders for 21st Century challenges. Continued civilian education helps develop confident, broadly-skilled, and adaptive leaders with enhanced competencies and improved capabilities earlier in their career. The flexibility of the program also encourages a lifelong

learning strategy because there is no time limit for completion; a critical element for an Army at war. In support of the College of the American Soldier, INCOPD has entered into a collaborative relationship with the American Council on Education to improve access to academic credit for PME courses and examinations taken outside traditional degree programs.

Earlier in this testimony, I discussed briefly the Structured Self Development Program (SSDP) initiative. Self Development is a key area and one of three domains of training and leader development. Structured Self Development (SSD) is planned, goal-oriented learning that reinforces and expands the depth and breadth of an individual's knowledge base, self awareness, and situational awareness. It complements institutional and operational learning, enhances professional competence, and meets personal objectives. The self development domain has three components: structured, guided and personal development. As an enabler to lifelong learning, SSD and Guided Self Development (GSD) bridge the gap between the institutional and operational domains in support of NCOES transformation. Enabling a train-ahead approach, the SSD consists of five levels of mandatory development spread across a Soldier's career. It will be supported by a robust evaluation and feedback process that includes self-assessment tools, the increased use of advanced technology like the Army Career Tracker, a secure test environment, achievable requirements, and policies that set the conditions for continuous growth. When fully implemented, SSD and GSD will improve Army readiness by integrating self-development into a lifelong learning approach. Lifelong learning is important to the entire Army, and for NCOs it is critical to foster an environment of continuous learning, since the challenges that face our NCOs are continuous.

Finally, I'd like to share with you a concept that synchronizes EPME and promotion cycles. Prior to the latest series of conflicts, promotions were directly linked to completion of a

requisite course of PME. But, due to the tremendous increase in deployments and training necessary to support them, these linkages were lost. Reinstating these linkages will provide the operational Army with NCO leaders trained and educated for the level of responsibility they are expected to perform in a deployed environment, as well as at home station. These four initiatives as well as a multitude of many other enablers all serve to enhance the Army's EPME efforts and reinforce the value of developing the whole Soldier.

The fourth theme of this testimony causes me to look ahead at the future of NCOES. We must ask ourselves, what will the Army of the 21st Century look like and what will be required of our men and women in uniform? General George Casey, Chief of Staff of the Army, states that "In the years ahead, the United States will confront complex, dynamic and unanticipated challenges to our national security and to the collective security of our friends and allies. These challenges will occur in many forms and will be waged across the spectrum of conflict – ranging from peaceful competition to general war and at all points in between." The Army envisions an education system that anticipates the future, and is structured to develop and deliver leaders capable of operating at the tactical, operational and strategic level upon assignment. We consider NCOs as the "backbone" of the Army; they spend most of their time in tactical units. The system that supplies their education must occur throughout their career if it is in fact going to prepare them for future assignments.

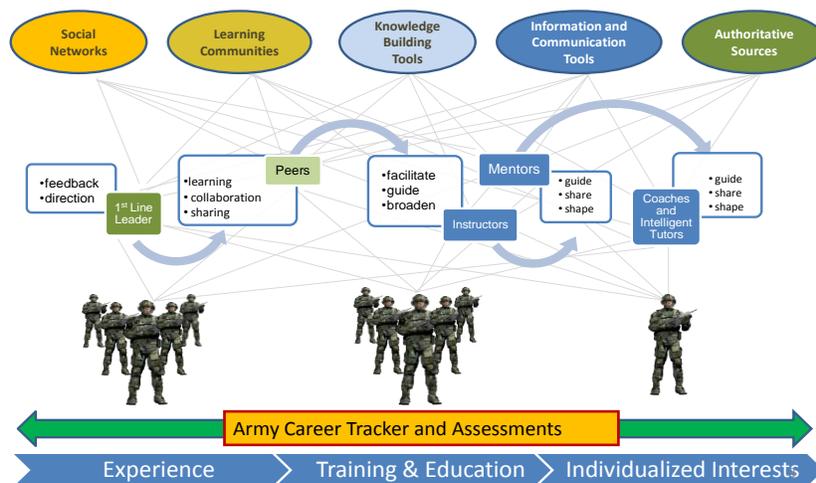
To really understand what we will look like, we must continuously examine our past. Admiral Stansfield Turner stated: "Studying historical examples should enable us to view current issues and trends through a broader perspective of the basic elements of strategy. Approaching today's problems through a study of the past is one way to ensure we do not become trapped within the limits of our own experience." The Army's EPME values

fundamentals of our history, and is committed to ensuring those principles and elements of education are continuously woven into how we think about the future. Equally important is an understanding of the dynamics of learning trends and how that will shape the learning environment of 2015. To that end, TRADOC is championing the Army Learning Concept for 2015. General Dempsey believes that in order to increase rigor, maintain relevancy, and prevail in the competitive learning environment, we have to change. Our current models have not kept pace with the rapid pace of change, the demands of Soldiers rotating in and out of the fight and a continuous influx of Soldiers with significant “digital literacy.” We all recognize the challenge and are working to adapt our learning models. We’re changing our assumptions to look at the problem differently, because we know we can’t afford to come up with the same solutions. Our solutions must consider emerging technologies and how Soldier’s employ these technologies in their daily lives. TRADOC is reaching out to experts inside and outside the military to help in this effort.

2015 Learning Environment

Not a One Size Fits All Solution

Achieving Deep Understanding through lifelong engagement



The graphic above illustrates concepts that are being developed to compliment the concepts and principles outlined in the Army Learning Concept for 2015, the Army Capstone Concept, the Army Training Concept and the Army Leader Development Strategy. The core foundation of EPME, the ongoing NCO cohort initiatives and the policy framework support the desired outcome of continuous, sequential and progressive training, education and experience that serve as the three pillars for effective leader development.

Our assessment of Army EPME is that it is healthy and achieving its objectives. We have a well developed organization with solid assessment and evaluation resources to ensure growth. Army leadership has underscored the value of Leader Development and has made it priority number one. Recognizing the need to adapt, the NCOES has transformed from a singularly focused and somewhat disparate program into a holistic and progressive system of sequential career-long learning. We recognize, however, that the program is not without challenges. As we seek to achieve the balance that General Casey has spent the last four years working to attain, we face the same challenges as Officer PME in terms of decreased availability of NCOs to attend PME. Backlogs of PME have been mitigated by the use of mobile training teams, shorter courses, and web based tools. This was necessary to address the long-term challenge of balancing quality of life, Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) schedules, and professional development requirements. We recognize that not everyone is getting the PME courses in a timely manner due to capacity challenges and current wartime demands. One measure of note is to align PME with the ARFORGEN model to more closely match PME throughput with deploying unit cycles. Though the current environment and recent operations have put greater demands on Soldiers and leaders to execute FSO in complex and uncertain environments, the real challenge for us remains the preparation of Soldiers and leaders who are

not only technically and tactically proficient, but who can think critically, make sound decisions, interact across cultures, and adapt as situations evolve. In order to accomplish this, we must continue to remain not only adaptive and responsive to operational changes, but produce leaders equipped with the right skills capable of predicting and responding to this ever changing environment. Our mission is to continue to transform to meet this changing environment, not grow complacent and await the next challenge.

In closing and on behalf of General Marty Dempsey, I would like to extend an invitation to each of you or your staff members to visit the Sergeants Major Academy or any of our professional military schools and centers of excellence across the Training and Doctrine Command. We believe this will lend more context and understanding of the direction our Army is headed with professional military education.