

The ATLDP - Six Months Later -- A Retiree's Perspective

By CW4 (Ret) Don Hess, USAWOA President Emeritus

As a retiree since 1975, my career as an Army warrant officer will not be affected by the recommendations of the Army Training and Leader Development Panel (ATLDP). However, I have remained interested and significantly involved in the warrant officer corps. Therefore, I wish to offer my perspective about the current "electronic chatter" going on within our Corps about the ATLDP, and what impact it may have on the Corps of the future.

First, I view the field reaction to the ATLDP report as a "**good news - bad news**" story. The **good** news is that the WO Corps has received the greatest publicity in the history of our Corps. The **bad** news is that the WO Corps has received the greatest publicity in the history of our Corps. More good news is the fact that 58 of the 63 recommendations contained in the ATLDP report deal with issues about which USAWOA forwarded significant proposals through the years. The bad news is that much of the publicity comes about because of very public discussions concerning the removal of the WO eagle insignia from our uniforms. Often, the discussion is charged with high emotion.

In my 43-year tenure as a warrant officer, I have witnessed similar responses from members over many similar issues, often equally emotional. Examples are:

- + When the Army changed the brown and gold or silver WO insignia to the current black and silver bar in 1972 the WO Corps was traumatized. We did not have e-mail in those days, but the then brand-new USAWOA and *Army Times* were inundated with letters from irate warrant officers demanding that the decision be reversed. For many weeks, the *Army Times* printed letters from warrant officers who wrote of "the demise of the WO Corps." However, demise did not happen. Warrant officers continued to serve with distinction wearing the new rank insignia.

- + The WO Career Center opened in 1992. At that time, warrant officers in the field accused USAWOA of supporting education programs "that detract from our technical expertise and lead to the Corps becoming 3d Lieutenants." This also did not happen, and warrant officers continued to serve with distinction as better educated officers.

- + When the WO Candidate Course was established and younger warrant officers graduated as WO1s, it was predicted that "they couldn't cut it" and "commanders will reject this new breed of warrant officers." It did not happen and younger warrant officers continued to serve with distinction.

- + When the Warrant Officer Management Act institutionalized the WO education and training systems and brought us grade CW5, the response from many warrant officers centered on the "two-time pass-over" provision that forced many senior warrant officers into retirement.

Again, the alarm was sounded that the "Corps was being sacrificed so a few warrant officers could be promoted to CW5." It did not happen and warrant officers continued to serve with distinction in grades CW4 and CW5.

- + When warrant officers were commissioned, many warrant officers objected, claiming "we will lose our identity as technical officers." Once again, it did not happen and warrant officers continued to serve with distinction as commissioned officers.

My point is that whenever the Corps makes advances to bring warrant officers into the mainstream of the officer corps, there are often some provisions that adversely affect individual warrant officers. We tend to focus on those issues that affect each of us as individual warrant officers. However, it's not about individual warrant officers. It's about transformation of the WO Corps for the future.

For the very first time with the ATLDP, the Army studied the Corps in depth and breadth. The ATLDP determined that the education, training and management of the WO Corps must be improved. The ATLDP also determined achievement of these goals will be best accomplished by integrating warrant officers into their respective branches. With such professional advances (good news) come emotional changes (bad news). The "bad news" may sadden us, but it does not adversely affect our ability to perform our duties.

Through the ATLDP, if thoroughly implemented, the Army leadership will commit valuable resources to the WO Corps. We will be given the professional tools to accomplish our mission. Let's move on. You will be the same warrant officer after you take off your eagles and put on branch insignia. I am convinced that just as we have done in the past, the WO Corps will continue to serve with distinction.