

Cultural Change and the Army Warrant Officer

By CW5 (Ret) Robert Huffman

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— Woodrow Wilson*

In August 2002, the [Army Training and Leader Development Panel, Phase III \(WO Study\)](#) Report was released, containing 63 recommendations grouped into four major categories. While all four of these are vastly important, in this document we will limit our focus to the recommendations on Army Culture. Army Culture within the report was a recommendation to “fully integrate warrant officers into the officer corps. Clarify and publish the role of the warrant officer, by pay grade, in the total Army. Manage, educate, and assign warrant officers to the specific needs and requirements of their branch.” In the opening paragraph Strategic Conclusions and Recommendation – The Bottom Line contained the following guidance to the Army.

“At the heart of this change is a complete integration of WOs into the larger officer corps – a process begun in the late 1980s and never completed. Warrant officers are recruited, accessed, paid, managed, educated, and retained separately from commissioned officers. The Army needs to clarify the roles of WOs, then make changes to WO professional development, training and education, and manning. These changes must be relevant to the roles of WOs and must be connected to each other by WOs’ need for lifelong learning, structure, and standards and assessment. The Army must adopt these recommendations as a whole, not individually. Only by fully integrating WOs into the larger officer corps can the Army expect to receive the synergistic benefits of this panel’s recommendations.”

Army Culture, including the full integration of WOs into the officer corps and WOs’ role throughout the Army, was at the center of this report with three imperatives lying at the differing points: manning, professional development, and training and education. Many Army WOs then and even now believe themselves to be separate from the rest of the officer corps; they frequently operate on the fringe of Army officer culture. They feel that they are technical experts who also perform many of the duties and functions of branch officers, but are not accorded the same consideration, compensation, and quality of education as the branch officers. This false belief in some separate and distinct service results in a negative effect upon many aspects of WOs’ service.

The Total Warrant Officer Study (TWOS) of 1985 began the process of integrating warrant officers into the officer corps, but because of **an obvious resistance to change and an Army Cultural bias**, that process was never completed. Warrant officers are recruited, accessed, paid, managed, educated, and retained separately from the rest of the officer corps. **From where does this cultural bias originate?** Does it originate from outside our cohort or from within it? If we go forward with the belief that

cultural bias is what is holding back the integration of WOs into the officer corps and that it originates from outside within our own cohort, maybe we can begin to identify ways to eventually complete this integration. Maybe something Max Planck, wrote in *The Philosophy of Physics*, 1936 is applicable.

"An important scientific innovation rarely makes its way rapidly winning over and converting its opponents; it rarely happens that Saul becomes Paul. What does happen is that its opponents gradually die out and that the growing generation is familiarized with the idea from the beginning."

Our old school warrant officers that protect the scared ground of this separate and distinct WO Corps will eventually die (retire) out as both those in and outside the cohort are familiarized with the idea from the beginning that warrant officers are in fact Army Officers. The NDAA FY11 contains language that permits the service secretary concerned to commission WO1s upon completion of accession training. No single action should drive home more readily that our WO Corps is part of the Officer Corps. Integrated educational opportunities are another area this cultural bias can be eliminated. If the Army sends those senior NCOs that are accepted for commissioning to become 2LTs to OCS why then would the Army continue to pursue a "separate but unequal" commissioning/accession program for its newly commissioned WO1s? I readily concede that these officers will have vastly different roles upon commissioning one remaining a generalist and the other focusing on functional/technical specialties throughout their careers. Development and implementation of an integrated education system for all Army officers that accounts for common direct leader skills and actions required by the Army Vision and future operational environment is a necessity that was called for in the ATLDP studies paragraph 104 and yet has not been realized in ten years.

Beyond accession training our SWOs require better training also. We now have Chief Warrant Officers of the Branch/Regiment in each of our basic branches containing warrant officers, several AV BDEs, BNs and SQDNs today have Command Chief Warrant Officers. Within the Army National Guard and Reserves there is a CCWO, the ARNG has a CCWO for each state and territory (54) and the USAR has a CCWO for each of its seven regions. These officers perform these duties remarkably well in spite of the fact that the Army provides them no formalized training as would be received at the pre-command course conducted at Fort Leavenworth, KS.

Of course many of these changes also will require that we within USAWOA look at ourselves as well. The USAWOA Mission Statement reads:

"To enhance the level of professionalism within all elements of the Corps and insure that those within and outside the Association understand and support that professionalism.

To insure that warrant officers in all elements of the Corps are properly and professionally represented within the Department of Defense, the Department of the Army, the Department of Veteran Affairs. The Military Coalition and other organizations associated with and supportive of the defense of our country. To insure that the recognition provided to warrant officers in all element of the Corps in the form of promotions, compensation, awards, training and education opportunities, etc. is appropriate and what is necessary to maintain a strong and effective Warrant Officers Corps.”

Once fully integrated into the fuller officer corps will our mission have been accomplished with what we set out to do as an association? If we reflect back on why the USAWOA was established in 1972 we will see that all of those issues have been resolved by the Army. Must we continue to perpetuate this separate and distinct association from the Army’s broadly based association?

In the past nine years since the publishing of the Army Training and Leader Development Panel, Phase III (WO Study) Report many of these 63 manning, professional development, and training and education recommendations have been fully addressed. Warrant Officers are included within DA PAM 600-3, are managed by their basic branches versus the (now dismantled) stand alone Warrant Officer Division, since July 2004 they have worn their basic branch insignia and colors rather than the Eagle Rising and WO Brown on dress uniforms. And yet here we are still awaiting the complete cultural integration of the Army Warrant Officer to the larger Officer Corps.

"After living with their dysfunctional behavior for so many years (a sunk cost if ever there was one), people become invested in defending their dysfunctions rather than changing them." — Marshall Goldsmith, Mojo

I have often pondered this one notion, and I believe it to be true; You can change a policy or procedure overnight with the stroke of a pen, or the publication of a new regulation, but it often takes 20 years to change a culture.

What is an Army Warrant Officer? The Army WO is a self-aware and adaptive technical expert, combat leader, trainer, and advisor. Through progressive levels of expertise in assignments, training, and education, the WO administers, manages, maintains, operates, and integrates Army systems and equipment across the full spectrum of Army operations. Warrant Officers are innovative integrators of emerging technologies, dynamic teachers, confident warfighters, and developers of specialized teams of Soldiers.

Why is this important to the Army? Warrant Officers are in all three components, 67 Military Occupational Skills (MOS), 17 branches, and comprise a significant portion of the total Army Officer population with ~25,000 members spread across the three

cohorts. If there are 88,000 total officers within all components of the army, the WO cohort accounts for greater than 20% of the total officer corps and yet we educate these officers differently, expecting them to assimilate knowledge via experiential development or on the job training.

"Everybody has accepted by now that change is unavoidable. But that still implies that change is like death and taxes — it should be postponed as long as possible and no change would be vastly preferable. But in a period of upheaval, such as the one we are living in, change is the norm." — Peter Drucker, *Management Challenges for the 21st Century* (1999)

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