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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

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October 27, 2010

The Honorable Ike Skelton
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
2120 Rayburn House Office Building

Dear Chairman Skelton:

Following our extensive study of officer in-residence professional military education (PME), the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee conducted a short inquiry on the state of the services' enlisted PME programs. The Subcommittee traveled on fact-finding trips to non-commissioned officer (NCO) and senior NCO schools at Fort Bliss, Texas; Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama; Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia; and Newport Naval Station, Rhode Island. We also collected documents, took briefings from the services, and held a hearing on July 28, 2010 entitled, "Transformation in Progress: Enlisted Professional Military Education in the Services," and compiled follow-up information after the hearing. While we will not publish a major report on this effort, we did want to inform and advise you on our work.

As you know, the Goldwater-Nichols Act addressed officer professional military education but did not legislate enlisted requirements. In fact, enlisted PME has received little attention from outside the services. Yet, the nature of operations has changed significantly over the last two decades and enlisted service members have been asked to assume more demanding roles, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While the Subcommittee did not delve very deeply into the joint EPME course, we did look at each of the services' programs. Areas we examined included the mission of the EPME institutions; the curricula and rigor of their programs; selection and quality of staff, faculty, and students; organization of the programs and schools; and, material resources dedicated to EPME. We found that service enlisted PME programs are responding to the changing needs of the services, the expanded role of the NCO, and new skills required by the global environment.

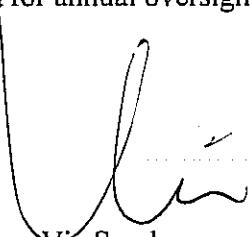
Since enlisted PME has been largely untouched by Congress and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), we found more diversity in these service-specific programs than we found in officer PME. Although not normally considered within the strict framework of PME, the Air Force placed a greater emphasis on civilian education and attainment of a college degree. This emphasis

placed a higher priority on seeking academic accreditation for PME courses; providing credit toward promotion for completion of college courses; and ultimately, results in a greater percentage of the AF enlisted force with college degrees than is found in the other services.

On the other hand, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps relied more on improving their traditional NCO development courses and schools. While the services structure their succession of EPME formal schooling along roughly similar lines from the junior enlisted ranks through promotion to E-7, there are significant differences in the courses offered to the most senior NCOs. These final courses are as long as 10 months for Army E-8s and E-9s and four weeks, supplemented by attendance at an annual senior NCO symposium, for all E-8s and senior-level E-9s in the Marine Corps. At the other end of the spectrum were the Air Force's eight day course for E-9s and the Navy's two-week course, which is restricted to those few E-9s selected for line leadership billets. The Army and Marine Corps seek to instill staff officer and critical thinking skills in their respective senior courses. The Navy and Air Force rely on their respective six-week long courses, Senior Enlisted Academy (Navy) and Senior NCO Academy (Air Force), to provide these skills to their E-7s and E-8s.

High operational tempo has affected all the services' ability to educate officers and NCOs. The Marine Corps's experience is perhaps illustrative of this tension. Some commanders have elected to delay sending gunnery sergeants (E-7s) to attend the Advanced Course, which is now mandatory for promotion to E-8. These difficult operational command decisions, coupled with a shortage of sufficient Advanced Course slots to enable all gunnery sergeants to attend, has created a promotion bottleneck at the gunnery sergeant rank. The Marine Corps must ensure they are providing enough opportunities for gunnery sergeants, including those operationally deferred, to obtain newly required PME for promotion. In addition, the Marine Corps has recognized that some commanders are reluctant to send their corporals to the in-residence Corporals Course or establish a command-sponsored Corporals Course. We agree with Marine Corps leaders that commanders should make every attempt to send their personnel to this important phase of EPME.

We recommend best practices be shared between the various schools and between the services. Some models to consider include the Navy's senior enlisted academy's integration with the Naval War College and their reading program as well as the Air Force's Community College of the Air Force and the Army's College of the American Soldier. Various faculty development programs should be shared and compared, as well. Finally, we recommend that the committee make enlisted PME a topic for annual oversight review in order to continue to monitor improvement and resource needs.



Vic Snyder
Chairman

Sincerely,



Rob Wittman
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable Buck McKeon

VS/RW:frs