

# **The Agile and Adaptive Warrant Officer Leader**

By CW5 (Ret) Al Eggerton

The transformation of the Army and our persistent engagement in a global war on terrorism has changed the characteristics we seek in those who lead our formations. We have re-examined the focus placed on single tracking our regularly commissioned officer leaders, and have backed away from the strict specialization that was a corner stone of the OPMS XXI study that led to the present OPMS. Our conversion to a modular and expeditionary force, with greater decentralized control and more independent combat organizations requires leaders with a greater breadth of skills, and a broader understanding of an Army component role in the larger joint operations. Over the past 6 years, the persistent engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan have increased the focus on developing leaders at all levels with a range of additional skills to complement core warfighting competency; to interact with the civil populace; to understand governance and infrastructure challenges.

How do warrant officers fit into this emerging agile and adaptive leadership framework? The answer to that question is rooted in the role warrant officers are designed to play in our Army. A warrant officer is not intended nor resourced to be a senior strategic leader. That is not to say that many do not provide critical advice at senior strategic levels, we all know that warrant officers regularly make key input to significant Army decisions. Even so, our roles are more narrowly defined, and for good reason. The complexities of modern military systems, and the even more complex interdependence of those systems in a joint environment require specialized officers who can provide focused expertise to keep systems and processes efficient and effective for combat, and who can maintain system connections between levels of the Army and across the joint force. Those officers are warrant officers. They provide the underpinning that allows senior leaders to achieve operational and strategic goals. Their primary responsibility is to sustain a level of knowledge of systems and processes that is impossible for leaders charged with directing and fighting the full range of capabilities of our modular organizations, and trained and educated to that end. The Army devotes the majority of its training resources for its warrant officers to equipping them with the technical skill and specific management/leadership experience needed to sustain that expert level of knowledge.

The most successful warrant officers have always been agile and adaptive leaders in their focused fields. This is not a new concept. Army technical systems are always a compromise between the ideal capabilities we want and the constrained resources we are given. Constrained resources require that we always apply creativity in using what we have to meet the mission or our country's defense. Warrant officer mental agility is often the key to mission success. Our exceptionally deep knowledge of systems and processes gives us many ways to attack any problem presented to us. Agility is the speed with which we sort through options and pick the few most likely to surmount obstacles to mission success. Warrant officer adaptability is evidenced in the way we modify existing systems or processes in times of maximum stress to overcome unforeseen challenges. The NCOs and civilian candidates selected for training as warrant officers are almost always chosen because their records reflect that they have demonstrated just such agility and adaptability in prior work or life. A successful warrant officer's performance file is a history of overcoming and adapting to bring success to his unit and the Army.

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The Army has recognized that it must apply additional resources to better prepare warrant officers to execute their roles as technical experts in the politically sensitive, complex environments of counterinsurgency, stability operations, civil support, and the range of non-combat missions that are supported today and will be supported in the future. Warrant officer inclusion in BOLC, the pilot for ILE attendance for selected warrant officers, the warrant officer education system needs analysis report, all are prompting changes in officer development that add to the agility and adaptability of our warrant officers. Even so, we must not expect the Army to invest in our development in exactly the same measure as they do for regularly commissioned officers. As our roles are different, so should our education and development be different as needed to support those roles.

I would encourage all warrant officers to read FM 3.0 Operations and DA PAM 600-3 Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management to understand the officer corps we are building for the future. Warrant officers have an important role to play, but it will remain limited in scope by design. Warrant officers have been and always will be a value proposition for the Army. They will continue to do more than is expected with less than is required, and the respect and compensation we are afforded by the Army will reflect that in the bargain.

Proud to serve!

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