

Rapid Changes Not Always Best

By Lt. Col. John G. Heslin

Changes that permeate the Army, from doctrine to administration, occur at an ever-increasing rate as new systems, policies and procedures produce new concepts which quickly become new doctrine only to be replaced all too rapidly. A "fever" for change bordering on the mentality of change for its own sake seems to exist.

To resist the wave of change is to run the risk of being labeled "negative," inflexible and unwilling to keep pace with the new Army of excellence. At times, however, it seems as if the Army is out of control.

Why must the Army rush headlong into implementation before fully assessing the wisdom of what it is about to do? Two examples of recent changes which, in time, may prove unwise are the implementation of the AirLand Battle doctrine and the rigid enforcement of the weight control program.

In the first instance, the Army has committed itself to a doctrine not fully accepted by its allies and not clearly supportable from a logistics point of view.

It appears that an Israeli-type preemptive

approach with its associated risks has been adopted while the wisdom of 30 years of clearly defensive doctrine in Central Europe has been forsaken. Is the Army forgetting that its stated mission is to defend; and that, if it leans too far forward in the saddle, some well-meaning commander may initiate action in order to be "proactive" rather than "reactive"? Perhaps Army leaders ought to rethink this doctrine in light of the collective wisdom of the community likely to have to live or die with it.

The second example has to do with the way the U.S. Army treats its soldiers. Is the crucial ingredient to success on the battlefield the performance of the soldiers, or is it something else? Are the soldiers being told that their performance is valued above all else, or that shortcomings in appearance may well offset years

of outstanding performance?

When national survival calls for the ultimate test of battle, will the most competent performers be called? Will reservists who are overweight be activated? Will soldiers' awards for heroism be denied because the soldiers are a few pounds overweight?

If the Army intends to enforce the weight control program rigidly, then it has forgotten the wisdom of the ages and may well suffer the fate of other armies that looked good but could not stand the test of fire.

I am not challenging the value of change or proposing that the Army remain static as the world around us changes. Rather, my concern is with the way the Army changes. Frequent change without benefit of thoughtful reflection only causes more change as mistakes that could have been avoided are corrected.

Maybe it is time to slow the pace and allow collective wisdom to judge the value of proposed actions. Perhaps then the Army may achieve a broader consensus on its doctrine and greater consistency in the treatment of its soldiers. □

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