

United States Military Academy

The Backbone of the Army Comes to the United States Corps of Cadets: The  
Tactical Noncommissioned Officer at the United States Military Academy

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Since the beginning of its existence, the United States Army has relied on a corps of noncommissioned officers (NCOs) to execute the day-to-day business that is required in a professional army. From the battle of Yorktown during the Revolutionary War, to modern day operations in the Balkans, the American NCO has been a key component in the successes or failures of the United States Army. NCOs fill crucial positions and are responsible for training and developing many of the Army's future leaders. Until recently the role of the NCO at the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point was relatively limited and often unclear. Recent changes within the last ten years to the structure, density and responsibilities of the NCOs at West Point have resulted in a significant increase in the role NCOs play in the development of the members of the Corps of Cadets. The current Tactical Noncommissioned Officer (TAC NCO) is an essential element in the development of the future leaders of the United States Army.<sup>1</sup>

The reasons why the United States Military Academy increased the TAC NCO from twelve in 1990 to thirty-six by 1996 were due to a variety of external and internal factors. These factors include: the change from a Fourth Class System (FCS) to the Cadet Leader Development System (CLDS) in 1989, the evolution and increased workload of the company Tactical Officers, and the adjustment of enlisted personnel strength across West Point in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These major factors, along with several minor contributing factors provided not only the impetus behind the increasing role of the TAC NCO, but also the resources (manpower) to support this increase. This paper will expose and explain the reasons behind the increase of the TAC NCO population from twelve in 1990 to thirty-six by 1996. Initially, this paper will briefly describe the history of the TAC NCO and then the current status of the TAC NCO. The focus of the paper will then shift to answering the question of "why" the TAC NCO developed into what it is today. This section will also cover in detail "how" the change was executed. Like most things at West Point, the evolution of the TAC NCO has been influenced and shaped by many different

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Adjutant General, United States Military Academy, Duty Description: Tactical Noncommissioned Officer, 25 October 1999.

factors. External pressures from the Regular Army, internal modifications to the way the Academy develops cadets and strong personalities in key leadership positions all played a role in the development of the company TAC NCO.

Enlisted soldiers and more specifically NCOs, have been actively involved at West Point since the Academy was founded in 1802. Sylvanus Thayer, the third Superintendent of West Point, used the enlisted soldiers of the ordnance platoon in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to clear large boulders from the Plain and to build facilities for the staff and faculty. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, soldiers from the engineer company gave instruction in practical military engineering.<sup>2</sup> However, this practice ended in the late 1950s. Over the last 30 to 40 years, one of the few times cadets interacted with Regular Army NCOs was during summer training at Camp Buckner. During Cadet Field Training (CFT) at Camp Buckner, Regular Army soldiers (led by NCOs) served as the principal trainers to cadets in basic military field skills. This exposure was limited to the two-month summer period and not until the early 1980's did cadets start seeing NCOs assigned to Brigade Tactical Department (BTD).

The BTD consists of Regular Army Officers whose primary mission is to develop the cadets, through the integration of the Academy Programs, to be leaders in the United States Army. The principal "developer" in the BTD is the Company Tactical Officer (TAC). Beginning in the early 1980s these BTD NCOs began work down in the cadet regiments and became known as TAC NCOs. Prior to August 1991, the Academy maintained these TAC NCOs at a ratio of 1 NCO per 360 cadets, or one NCO per cadet battalion.<sup>3</sup> Initially called Battalion TAC NCOs their duties focused on the traditional duties of a Regular Army 1SG. Battalion TAC

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<sup>2</sup> McGonagle, Leo., "The Demise of USMAs Engineer Detachment as Trainers of the Corps." (Graduate Paper LD 720, West Point, 1998), 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Memorandum for Record. "Comments on the DoD Inspector General Report (Draft) on Noninstructional Military Positions at the United States Military Academy." Signed by Brigadier General (BG) Robert Foley, 26 August 1993.

NCOs monitored uniform appearance, key control, weight control, drill and ceremony, and barracks maintenance.<sup>4</sup>

The story of the company TAC NCO does not begin with the directive in August 1991 that establishes one regular Army NCO in each cadet company. The struggle for the concept of a company TAC NCO to be resourced and to survive in a time of Army-wide downsizing is worthy of some attention in this paper. Beginning in the late 1980s, West Point experienced the large downsizing process also occurring within the Regular Army. Following the buildup of the Armed Forces during the Reagan administration, the services began to make significant cuts in personnel and material following the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union. The lack of a clear threat and the desire to spend more funds on domestic matters saw a gradual decline in the amount of money available to the services. This "tightening of the belt" encompassed the entire Army and this included the West Point community. In the fall of 1990 the Superintendent, Lieutenant General (LTG) Dave Palmer, conducted a review of the Tables of Distribution and Allowances (TDA) for West Point with the Department of the Army. The TDA sets out the Army guidance for what personnel and material a particular Army unit or post is authorized to have:

As a result of this assessment the Department of the Army (DA) directed West Point to make a certain number of personnel cuts. The DA Decrement Program named Quick Silver directed West Point to decrement 26 officer positions, 13 enlisted positions and 132 civilian positions.<sup>5</sup> DA directed the number of personnel slots cut from the TDA, but they left the decision of what slots to cut to the Superintendent.<sup>6</sup> As a result of this review, Palmer decided to eliminate the 12 authorizations for the battalion TAC NCOs. This decision effectively terminated

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<sup>4</sup> Memorandum for CSM Semon, United States Corps of Cadets Command Sergeant Major. "USCC Tactical NCO METL." 26 June 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum for Record. "Decision Meeting, Restoration of Battalion Tactical NCOs." Minutes from a meeting taken by Mr. Desmond Kennedy. Chief, Manpower, Equipment & Documentation Branch (Resource Management). 26 June 1991

the battalion TAC NCO position and would have killed the company TAC NCO concept before it was even born.

Believing the TAC NCO played a critical role in the cadet's development and keeping an eye on the future concept of the company TAC NCO, the Commandant, Brigadier General (BG) David Bramlett, attempted to reinstate the authorizations for the battalion TAC NCOs. On 3 December 1990, Bramlett requested through formal channels the restoration of 10 of the 12 battalion TAC NCO positions.<sup>7</sup> Bramlett followed this request with a meeting in the Superintendent's office on 8 February 1991. In a Memorandum for Record (MFR) of the meeting, Bramlett noted that Palmer believed that the Commandant was convinced of the "need for the 12 Battalion TAC NCOs and would so support".<sup>8</sup> Bramlett told Palmer that only nine NCO positions were needed because USCC had internally transferred three NCO positions to TAC NCOs.<sup>9</sup> Also included in this MFR is the Commandant's note that "the Superintendent left open" the issue of the one Tactical NCO per Company, or a total of 36.<sup>10</sup> This is the first meeting where Bramlett planted the seed of the company TAC NCO.

As a result of this meeting and subsequent memorandum, the USMA staff agencies (led by the Post Command Sergeant Major) began a detailed review of the enlisted authorizations across USMA so they could meet the Superintendent's guidance and restore the battalion TAC NCOs. At a Manpower Issues Decision Brief, Palmer ordered the initial restoration of the TAC NCOs to the battalion level on 12 July 1991. The military police, the aviation detachment and USCC lost several slots each to "pay the bill" for the nine slots.<sup>11</sup> The five authorizations that

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mrs. Bernadette Orland. Former Action Officer, Resource Management, USMA. Conducted by the author, 22 October 1999 at West Point, New York.

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum for Record. "Decision Meeting, Restoration of Battalion Tactical NCOs."

<sup>8</sup> Memorandum for Record. "Meeting with the Superintendent 8 February 1991." Signed by Brigadier General (BG) David A. Bramlett, Commandant, USCC. 13 February 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Memorandum for Record. "Manpower Issues Decision Brief to the Superintendent." Minutes from a meeting taken by Mr. Dave Sundby, Resource Management. 1 August 1991.

USCC relinquished were to be backfilled by civilians at a later date<sup>12</sup>. Battalion TAC NCOs once again were an authorized position in USCC.

Shortly after the Decision Brief to Palmer in July 1991, USCC moved forward and began assigning their regimental and battalion TAC NCOs to individual cadet companies. The "long-term goal" was to have one NCO per company. USCC did not have the necessary 36 authorized personnel slots required to fill each cadet company (they only had 12 at this time), but they did have the Superintendent's commitment to look into the feasibility of a TAC NCO per company. For almost one year the issue of the company TAC NCOs was not addressed formally and it remained an unresolved issue. The Commandant and the staff agency responsible for monitoring and modifying the TDA (Resource Management) carried on the issue after the departure of Palmer in late 1991.

In May 1992 the Director of Resource Management asked for and received guidance on the issue of authorizations of company TAC NCOs for USCC. Working under the understanding that no additions to the TDA were coming from the Department of the Army and the 24 positions needed would have to come from within USMA, Resource Management in conjunction with the Post Command Sergeant Major, studied the courses of action available to meet the Superintendent's guidance.<sup>13</sup> Much like the first scrub in 1991, this review required all Major Activity Directors (MAD) to submit a list of enlisted positions to be transferred to USCC so they could be changed in the TDA to reflect a company TAC NCO position. Disagreement with scrub came from all over West Point. Many of the MADs agreed with the Garrison Commander's recommendation, which went against moving these positions to USCC.<sup>14</sup> The option the USMA Staff Agencies presented to and approved by the Superintendent in the fall of 1992 cast a wide net. The "billpayer" for the company TAC NCO included; the Provost Marshall (3 positions),

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Memorandum for Chief of Staff. "Authorization of Tac NCO Positions in USCC." Signed by Colonel Edward T. Counts. Director, Resource Management. 5 May 1992.

Military Police Company (8 positions), Engineer Company (2 positions), Aviation Detachment (1 position), 1-1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion (1 position), Stewart Army sub-post (1 position), Office Director of Intercollegiate Athletics (1 position), DOIM (3 positions), Range Control (3 positions), and the Adjutant General's Office (1 position).<sup>15</sup> After being in existence in USCC "unofficially" for more than a year, the company TAC NCO was now an authorized, and more importantly, a resourced enlisted position at USMA.

An understanding of the current roles and responsibilities of the Company TAC NCO is required to better understand the powerful influence these NCOs have on the cadets. A Company TAC NCO of today is usually a Sergeant First Class with between 12-16 years of service in the Regular Army. He or she has served successfully as a platoon sergeant or drill sergeant and comes highly recommended from their previous chain of command.<sup>16</sup> The duty description of the TAC NCO of today is as follows:

The Tactical Noncommissioned Officer is the senior NCO and essential leader developer for a company of cadets at the United States Military Academy. A TAC NCO functions much like a First Sergeant. A TAC NCO is responsible to conduct and supervise drill and ceremony, serve as a role model, provide mentorship to young cadets, counsel, and work directly with all cadets, focusing on cadet sergeants, corporals, and privates. He or she will work in a TAC team to establish proper command climate within their respective companies. They will exemplify the high standards that are expected of the NCO Corps.<sup>17</sup>

Translating this duty description into operational or day-to-day terms, a TAC NCO would find himself or herself teaching some of the following classes to cadets during the academic year: establish and maintain a duty roster, conduct unit formations, review unit standard operating procedures, and actively supervise your subordinates.<sup>18</sup> On a more informal basis the Company

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<sup>14</sup> Summary Sheet. "TAC NCO Authorizations." Signed by Colonel Edward T. Counts. Director, Resource Management. 24 September 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Information Paper Obtained from the United States Corps of Cadets Personnel Officer, "Tactical Noncommissioned Officer Program", 20 October 1999.

<sup>17</sup> Office of the Adjutant General, USMA, Duty Description: Tactical NCO. 25 October 1999.

<sup>18</sup> USCC Circular 350-1 (Volume 3) Leader Development Class #6. Downloaded from the United States Corps of Cadets Leader Development Branch Homepage, 15 October 1999.

TAC NCOs mentor young cadets by setting the example of what a leader should be by his or her daily actions.

The other member of the TAC Team is the Company Tactical Officer (TAC). The TAC is legal company commander of the Cadet Company and he or she is the immediate supervisor of the TAC NCO.<sup>19</sup> The TAC is responsible for the leader development of each individual cadet. The TAC NCO assists the TAC in his responsibilities. Usually the TAC and TAC NCO divide the development workload. The TAC focuses on the Cadet Officer Development and the TAC NCO focus on those cadets holding the NCO ranks.<sup>20</sup> According to most TACs their jobs would be much more difficult and cadet development would suffer greatly without the presence of their TAC NCO. Daily exposure to the Company TAC NCO provides cadets the opportunity to observe a leadership styles they will most likely encounter when they enter the Regular Army. As it can be seen, the modern-day TAC NCO is a powerful influence on the development of the cadets. Why and how the TAC NCO got to this position is the heart of this paper.

In 1986 when Palmer became the Superintendent of the United States Military Academy, he had a vision of how the Academy trained cadets to be leaders. LTG Palmer led the Academy through some of the most dynamic changes in the almost 200 years the Academy has been in existence. Palmer made several significant changes while at the helm to the way West Point trained cadets to become Army Officers. These changes included revising the tenure of the permanent professors, reforming the academic curriculum (majors and electives), department restructuring, and the drastic modification of the West Point Leader Development System.<sup>21</sup> The change in the leader development system is the most important change under the supervision of Palmer with regards to the increase in the number of TAC NCOs . In 1989 the Academy

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<sup>19</sup> Brigade Tactical Department Fact Sheet. Obtained from the United States Corps of Cadets Personnel Office, 25 October 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Memorandum for Record. "Comments on the DOD Inspector General Report (Draft) on Noninstructional Military Positions at the United States Military Academy." Signed by Brigadier General (BG) Robert Foley., Commandant, USMA, 26 August 1993.

discarded the Fourth Class System (FCS) and adopted the Cadet Leader Development System (CLDS). Although the detailed reasons why Palmer made this change are beyond the scope of this paper, they do play an important role in the increase in the number and responsibilities of the Company TAC NCO.

Palmer's beliefs on CLDS are important for this paper because they help explain why the senior leader of the Academy made the change from one TAC NCO per battalion to one TAC NCO per company. As shown previously, the cost of making the Company TAC NCO a reality was steep. This cost is even steeper given the reduction in personnel strength and limited fiscal budgets. The change to CLDS can be attributed to Palmer's belief that the leader development system had to be tied in with the Academy's mission statement and purpose. Palmer felt that CLDS stressed leader development throughout the entire four-year cadet experience while the FCS was dysfunctional and taught the cadets poor leader techniques that would not be used in the Army after graduation.<sup>22</sup> During 1988, the Middle States Accreditation Steering Committee submitted an interim report to Superintendent that sheds light on why Palmer wanted cadets to be exposed to more Regular Army Noncommissioned Officers. Two of the findings of this report are relevant to the discussion of the TAC NCO. The report stated the FCS had the several problems. These included:

1. The duties required in the system conflict with Army practices.
2. Upperclass Cadets learn improper leadership techniques that are inconsistent with those practiced in Army Units.<sup>23</sup>

The Superintendent took these findings to heart when he made the change to CLDS. Palmer committed himself deeply to the belief that everything the Academy did should support

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<sup>21</sup> Crackel, Theodore J., *The Illustrated History of West Point*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1991), 297-302.

<sup>22</sup> Piggot, James. "The Origins Behind the Cadet Leader Development System." (Graduate Paper LD 720, West Point, 1995), 14-16.

<sup>23</sup> Golden, James R., "Interim Report of the Accreditation Steering Committee", West Point, 1988), 6-7.

the Academy mission and purpose. Using this logic, it is easy to understand why he committed to one TAC NCO per company despite the high cost. In the Superintendent's mind the Company TAC NCO would provide a daily example of what a leader in the Regular Army looks and acts like. The TAC NCO would also help to drive out some of the problems that remained from the old FCS. Palmer did not come to this conclusion overnight. As shown previously, he actually eliminated all the TAC NCOs positions in 1989 because of Department of the Army mandated cuts in personnel strength. But, as Palmer's vision of how the Academy should develop the leadership skills of the cadets evolved, he realized the important role the TAC NCO could play in his vision. His change in attitude reflects his commitment to supporting the purpose of the Academy.

Another external factor influencing the development of the company TAC NCO was a study conducted in the late 1980s called Project Proteus. This project examined the early career of USMA graduates by asking recent graduates still on active duty to assess the military leadership training they obtained at West Point.<sup>24</sup> The feedback received from the field army pointed to several common threads. Some of the problems raised by the recent graduates included lack of training in supply, maintenance, accountability and difficulty relating with junior enlisted soldiers and noncommissioned officers.<sup>25</sup> For the purpose of this paper, the most important theme involved cadet interaction with enlisted soldiers. The comments from Proteus indicated graduates had problems interacting with enlisted soldiers during their first assignment because their exposure as cadets was limited to summer military training.<sup>26</sup> Although the results of this project were not conclusive, Proteus did provide additional data points for the Academy's senior leadership to draw on when it came time to make decisions on policies such as the company TAC NCO. One of the limitations of the Proteus Project included the fact that the

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<sup>24</sup> McGonagle, Leo., "The Demise of USMAs Engineer Detachment as Trainers of the Corps." (Graduate Paper LD 720, West Point, 1998), 16.

<sup>25</sup> United States Military Academy. *Project Proteus: Early Career Preparation Experiences and Commitment of Female and Male West Point Graduates, Volume II*. West Point, New York: 1988.

feedback given to the Academy drew on the limited experiences of the most recent graduates. Formal, systemic feedback on the performance of West Point Graduates from the Army's more senior leadership (battalion and brigade commanders) only became a reality in 1997 with the annual Battalion Commander's Survey conducted by Academy Faculty at the Army War College.<sup>27</sup> None the less, the data from Project Proteus supported the decision to increase the TAC NCO ratio to one per cadet company.

Another source that influenced both Palmer and Bramlett came from outside the Academy. During the spring, West Point Graduates around the World gather for Founder's Day festivities. Founder's Day is held to celebrate the founding of the Academy in 1802. Frequently the senior leaders of the Academy make trips to speak at Founder's Day dinners held at large Army installations. During many of these speeches conducted by Palmer and Bramlett, a common theme began to surface. Older graduates still in the Army and recent graduates serving as lieutenants told the superintendent and the commandant that they wish cadets could get more exposure to soldiers and NCOs when they were at the Academy.<sup>28</sup> Palmer took this feedback and it influenced his decision with regards to TAC NCOs.

Several internal factors influenced Palmer's decision to increase the number of TAC NCOs. These factors can be tied to feedback the Superintendent was receiving from the BTDC and USCC on the implementation of CLDS. To understand the role CLDS played on the development of the TAC NCO, we must briefly describe CLDS. At the time of Palmer, the purpose of USMA was to provide the nation with leaders of character. CLDS provides the "framework within which the four year West Point Experience achieves" this purpose.<sup>29</sup> CLDS stresses the development of the cadet over the entire 47-month experience. Cadets are

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> United States Military Academy. *Summary Report of the Second Annual Battalion Commander's Survey*. West Point, New York: November 1998.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Colonel (Ret.) James Siket. Former Brigade Tactical Officer, USCC 1989-1994. Conducted by the author by telephone, 23 November 1999 at West Point, New York.

sequentially passed through CLDS by their class year. With each passing year, a cadet's rank is increased to coincide with increased expectations of a cadet's level of development. Plebes or 4<sup>th</sup> class cadets are cadet privates. Yearlings or 3<sup>rd</sup> class cadets are cadet corporals. Cows or 2<sup>nd</sup> class cadets are cadet sergeants. Firsties or 1<sup>st</sup> class cadets are cadet officers. The cadet rank system was deliberately established to be similar to the Army rank system so cadets learned through experience the relationships between the different ranks. Although this was not the first time USMA had used cadet corporals, cadet sergeants and cadet officers, it was the first time the rank structure had been incorporated into the cadet developmental system.

With the implementation of CLDS in the late 1980s, the Brigade Tactical Department struggled with making the new system operational. Much like today, the TACs of the late 1980s and early 1990s were the integrators of cadet development. The TACs had access to all areas of cadet development: academic, military, and physical. Ensuring the new CLDS framework was being utilized became the responsibility of the Tactical Department. A key component of CLDS is the detailed feedback a cadet receives during the performance duties. Evaluation and feedback identifies successful aspects of a cadet's performance and it also identifies areas needing improvement.<sup>30</sup> As CLDS matured and developed, TACs found themselves spending more and more time counseling cadets on their performance. Both by directive and informally, TACs were counseling each of their 120 cadets at least once per semester. This counseling, combined with the counseling of cadets requiring specialized attention, began limiting the time a TAC had in order to personally observe the performance and development of all of his or her cadets.<sup>31</sup> Company TACs had difficulty meeting all the counseling requirements demanded of them by CLDS.

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<sup>29</sup>United States Military Academy Circular 1-101. *The Cadet Leadership Development System*, West Point, New York (1994), 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Memorandum For Record. Signed BG Foley.

The Academy, and more specifically the Brigade Tactical Department, began to search for a solution to their problem. Since the 1980s the Tactical Department had NCOs at the battalion and regimental level. Their duties and responsibilities did not have much to do with cadet leadership development. With the implementation of CLDS in 1989, an opportunity was seen to make better use of these NCOs. Given the nature of the rank structure of CLDS (private to NCO to officer) and the requirements to counsel directed by CLDS, the BTD leadership decided to try and get one TAC NCO per cadet company. Effective 15 August 1991, two years after the integration of CLDS, USMA reassigned all regimental and battalion TAC NCOs to duty positions as company tactical noncommissioned officers with the "long-term goal" to have each company be assigned a TAC NCO.<sup>32</sup> The original duties of the Company TAC NCO were designed with some of the early challenges of CLDS in mind. Company TAC NCOs were directed to focus their counseling on those cadets holding NCO ranks: primarily the 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Cadets. The TAC and the TAC NCO were to coordinate their efforts to ensure the maximum development of all their assigned cadets. For the first time in Academy history, the Company TAC had been given real assistance in developing his or her cadets.

Additionally, the senior Academy leadership at time felt the Company TAC NCOs would provide a good representation or template for the cadets to follow as they assumed the role of noncommissioned officers. Helping cadets understand the role NCOs play in accomplishing both the unit mission and taking care of the members of the unit was going to be a primary function of the company TAC NCO.<sup>33</sup> Another reason that company TACs came into being is found in a letter dated 10 March 1993 and written by the Brigade Tactical Officer (BTO). The BTO, writing to his counterpart at the United State Air Force Academy concerning the issue of TAC NCOs at the company level states one of the reasons USMA went to one TAC NCO per Company was

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<sup>32</sup> Memorandum for Record. "Assignment of Tactical Noncommissioned Officer." Signed by Colonel James R. Siket, Brigade Tactical Officer, United States Corps of Cadets. 27 August 1991.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with LTC Jeffrey Weart. Former Tactical Officer, USCC 1989-1992. Conducted by the author, 22 October 1999 at West Point, New York.

because the Commandant believed “they were essential to cadet development” because cadets would see the same level of NCOs at their first duty assignment. The Commandant also felt the TAC NCO “added a degree of the real Army to the Corps life style.”<sup>34</sup>

This paper argues the company TAC NCO became a reality as a result of multiple internal and external factors. The jump from zero TAC NCOs in the 1970s, to 12 in the 1980s and finally 36 in the 1990s cannot be attributed to single factor. Changing organizational goals, internal realignments, external pressures and senior leader influence all played a part in this process. Using this type of logic leaves this paper open to the counter argument that nothing caused the increase in the number of TAC NCOs. The counter argument says that this increase just happened and would have happened naturally during the evolution of the Military Academy. Company TAC NCOs came about because that is the way it “was meant to be” the counter argument could go. This paper has shown that this natural evolution of the company TAC NCO did not occur. It is faulty reasoning to say things “just happen”. There are many examples contained in this paper where conscious decisions were made by the Academy with regards to company TAC NCOs. Illustrated by the research in this paper, a large amount of time, resources and organizational thinking went into the company TAC NCO decision. It is true to say that some factors were more influential than others. LTG Palmer’s commitment to the implementation of CLDS and feedback from the Commandant and the BTD were two key influencing factors. The informal feedback from the field army, data from Project Proteus, and the beliefs of the Commandant provided supporting influences to the decision.

What is the legacy of Palmer’s decision to establish company TAC NCOs? Although probably too soon to tell, there are some early indicators of what affect this decision has had and will have in the future. This decision requires the Academy to justify and be accountable for its thinking when reviewed by an outside agency. As late as the fall of 1993 the Academy defended

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<sup>34</sup> Letter written to Colonel Barry L. Ream by Colonel James R. Siket, Brigade Tactical Officer, United States Corps of Cadets. 10 March 1993.

its decision to have company TAC NCOs to the Department of Defense Inspector General (DODIG). The DODIG characterized the TAC NCOs as noninstructional positions and “not essential” to the mission of the Academy.<sup>35</sup> The Superintendent responded to this report by justifying the company TAC NCO with some of the same ideas and beliefs that established the program in the first place. The Academy’s response stated that TAC NCOs gave critical instruction and that they teach cadets how officers and NCOs interact and this is important because “past surveys have indicated that the greatest weakness cadets have as lieutenants is an inability to work effectively with NCOs”.<sup>36</sup>

What about feedback from the field Army? In 1997 the Academy began conducting formal surveys with former battalion commanders to see how well graduates perform and how well Academy programs coincide with Army needs.<sup>37</sup> The 1997 battalion commander’s survey identified a “weakness in the young graduates’ ability to work with noncommissioned officers” while the 1998 survey did not identify this as a weakness.<sup>38</sup> Former commanders stated graduates were confident in their relationships with NCOs and receptive to NCO advice.<sup>39</sup> Although it is not reasonable to say that company TAC NCOs are solely responsible for the improvement in the relationships young graduates have with NCOs as lieutenants, it is appropriate to say they have had a positive influence on those relationships.

The decision to implement one NCO per cadet company challenged LTG Palmer to operationalize what he was preaching. Palmer preached leadership development as the cornerstone to the USMA purpose. The shift to one NCO per company was not an easy one because the bill for this action had to be paid from within the Academy itself. It is often easier to talk about a certain belief then to backup that belief with definitive action when the time comes.

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<sup>35</sup>Memorandum for the Department of Defense Inspector General. Subject: Comments on the DoD IG Report (Draft) on Noninstructional Military Positions at the USMA., Signed by LTG Howard Graves. West Point, New York. 24 August 1993.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., Enclosure 2, page 1.

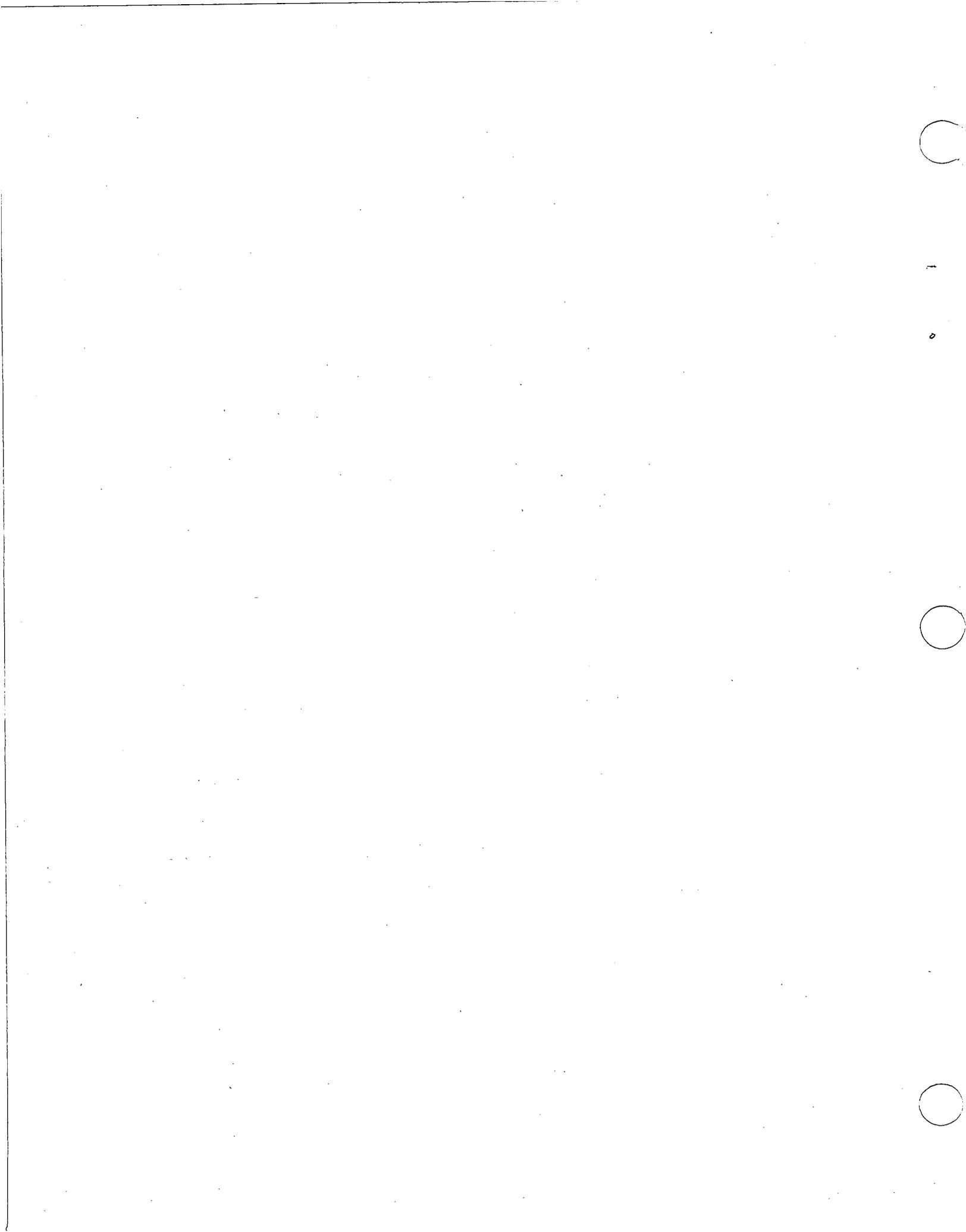
<sup>37</sup>United States Military Academy. *Summary Report of the Second Annual Battalion Commander’s Survey*. West Point, New York: November 1998. Page 1.

The Army did not authorize the slots for the program because they did not see an overwhelming need for the position. Palmer had to face the criticism from within because he took the slots “out of hide”. Although influenced by many factors including feedback/advice from some of his closest subordinates, Palmer ultimately decided the direction the TAC NCO program would take. His courageous decision not only enhanced the performance of cadet NCOs at the Academy, but it also improved the Army as a whole by making the NCO/Officer relationship a critical part of every cadet’s West Point Experience. The ramifications of this decision, although difficult to put into tangible/measurable terms, will be felt in the Regular Army for years to come.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 21-22.



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