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# Army's paradox: 'Culture of lying' vs. professionalism

My U.S. Army War College colleagues have caused another ripple in the pool of Army culture. Drs. Lenny Wong and Steve Gerras's monograph "Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession" is sure to evoke discussion among members of the largest military service.

Their study is based on data and evidence from discussion groups of officers across the Army. Wong and Gerras's thesis and findings are simple: the overwhelming number of requirements placed on military members both in garrison and operational settings drives falsification of myriad reports to the extent that senior leaders do not trust the veracity of Army assessments. This falsification or lying occurs in battlefield reporting, certification of training and personnel evaluations.

This duplicity obviously contradicts the espoused Army Ethic and the professional value of integrity.

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Most troubling, this behavior seems to have acquired cultural acceptance and reflects that which is rewarded or, perhaps, does not have significant negative consequences when it comes to lying.

Reactions to the monograph have ranged from heads nodding in agreement to pouting faces of those who feel that the authors unfairly impugned the integrity of the officer corps. I suggest reading the full study (only 33 pages of

text) rather than snippets from the news and media outlets before passing judgment.

While Wong and Gerras expose a current situation within the Army, I am more concerned about the future of the Army. Force reduction initiatives have targeted uniformed personnel to achieve force structure authorizations in grade (officer and enlisted), specialty, and component (active and reserve).

As Army boards seek to identify and retain the best soldiers, previously masked records, less-than-favorable documentation, or older evaluation reports are now in play for review. These serve as discriminating factors; they may contribute to the separation of talented and accomplished personnel.

A second area of concern is a paradoxical effect of efforts to re-professionalize the Army with emphasis on accountability, especially in garrison environments. One can envision the increasing

requirements for reporting maintenance, training, budgeting and administration. Accordingly, performance metrics for these requirements may drive reporting behavior that rewards "good" numbers and conversely jeopardizes anything less.

The Army culture has been down this road before. I recall the pressures of Quarterly Training Briefs (QTBs) and Logistical Readiness Reviews (LRRs) of the 1990s. For field grade officers in branch-qualifying positions, making the numbers have direct influence on their make-or-break officer evaluation reports (OERs).

Some of us also recall the days of "PowerPoint Rangers," when staff presentation skills may have been valued over warfighting skills in the peacetime Army.

The past decade-plus of war has fostered collaboration among people and military organizations. Without the operational necessity to work together, I foresee the

return of a competitive environment that can quickly become dysfunctional. The drive-to-survive may lead people to provide our institution what it really rewards (dubious indicators of performance) rather than what it espouses. The culture could revert to rewarding looking good, rather than being good.

Some observers may contend that this culture of lying has surfaced because of the stresses of a long period of conflict for the Army. I offer a counter-point: During my military career, the Army has encountered the same challenges during the post-Vietnam and post-Desert Shield draw-downs that have initiated subsequent examinations of the profession.

We are once again at such an inflection point for the Army profession. I hope that this commentary adds another ripple in the reflection pool of Army culture. □