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 validity 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.

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 reviewing 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), especially, 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.

while reducing their pay increases on an annual basis. This does not make sense to me. Also, talk is going on about putting retirement funds in a 401(K) which as many folks know can be reduced by 30-50 percent in an economic downturn in this country which not only can but will happen within the next 10-15 years again.

I would like to see Congress do something about the sequester while they continuously receive their annual pay increases which they approved, that has been put in place and stop attempting to fix the problem with intermittent increases to offset a particular situation such as the airborne attack on ISIS.

Sometimes we say the best thing to do is just don’t vote for the individuals we have in Congress and start over. Practically, this will never happen. It would be nice if we could find a quick fix, but practicality it will never happen.

The least we can do is let our representatives know how we feel and express those feeling to them and above all, continue to vote for the candidate of your choice. Maybe, just maybe we may get some support someday.

— CW4 Donald E. Macaulay (ret.)
San Antonio, Texas

FORUMS

The best from our discussion boards at militarytimes.com/forums, Army Times’ Facebook page and our blog Outside the Wire at militarytimes.com/blogs/outside-the-wire.

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SPECIAL OPERATORS

About “Spec ops needs 5,000 soldiers”:

If you look at the Army’s plan for the future this makes sense. There’s a movement toward low intensity conflict and non-conventional warfare so the Army is looking for more involvement from special operations rather than large units. The drawdown of the regular Army is occurring but if you actually look at projections of special operations numbers it’s scheduled to grow. It has to do with how we are going to continue fighting rather than how many people we’re going to throw out there.

— Manning Hunter

Great now everyone will really be spec ops at the bar!!!

— Neil Darius Bryan

I didn’t choose the operator life. The operator life chose me.

— Mohammed Scofield

Must be the ramp up to “no boots on the ground”....

— Dan Witmer

NEW RANGER PACKING LIST

Readers respond to “Ranger School adds packing list for women”:

If they want to be Rangers, there should be no special accommodations made. Just like in the Australian Army, they can do everything in the presence of men. Using the U.S. military as an experimental test bed has to stop. What is going to happen when they go on week long operations under combat conditions? Going to make sure they maintain feminine hygiene, privacy, birth control?

— Joseph Brauchle

I know a lot of females, especially medics, who have gone on combat operations much longer than a week. Get over it.

— Marty DuMont

When I was in charge of female soldiers I would have preferred them have something to use to go to the restroom instead of squatting and exposing themselves to more danger. This is pretty smart. Now before we go out and get all high and mighty, guys use piss bottles so that’s an invalid argument.

— Dan Witmer

Oh and by the way, I had to buy my wife two of these for her deployment so that way she wouldn’t expose herself to danger going to the porta potties at night on the FOB. Whatever works.

— James Lerma

All women ranger team. IDK why it’s not happening yet.

— Ryan Archuleta

VA CHIEF AND STOLEN VALOR

Comments on “VA chief sorry for false special forces claim”:

Of all places in the world, the head of the VA is the WORST place to play stolen valor!!!

— Terry Kaas

False official statement. People get court martialed for this.

— Dawann Washington

Put a former combat 1SG in charge of the VA. Things will change in a hurry.

— Brendan McAllister