



PERSPECTIVES

IN DEFENSE MANAGEMENT

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WINTER 1975-76

INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE
OF THE ARMED FORCES

IN SUPPORT OF HOMESTEADERS

Have you ever been transferred from a job that you enjoyed but your replacement didn't want? Did you ever want to stay somewhere long enough to learn the names of the streets? Have you ever said, "I could stay here indefinitely?" Do you dislike starting something and then not seeing it through?

If you answered "yes" to three of these statements you may have latent home-steading tendencies.

The military has enforced occupational mobility. People seldom spend more than three years in the same place, and they often switch jobs during that time. Part of the reason for this policy is the need for professional development. A well-rounded background includes experience in several positions, and the more varied the experience the better qualified is the individual to hold positions of broad scope. Ergo, the more likely he or she is to be promoted. Since not everyone likes the same kind of work, many jobs have a rapid turnover of occupants, some happy and some unhappy.

I would like to make a pitch for keeping happy people in the jobs that make them happy.

For example, the Army has a mortuary system in Europe. In the last fifteen years, as I have personally ascertained, at least two of its commanders enjoyed the work and wanted to stay, while at least two others did not want the assignment, were upset when they got it, and tried to leave as quickly as possible. How much better it would have been for all concerned, including the whole military establishment, if the first two had been given extended tours and the remaining two sent elsewhere. The happy occupants had no incentive to leave. They knew they were not going to be promoted much higher; variety of experience would not help them. They were specialists and they wanted to remain specialists. Some jobs, such as command of battalions, have many seekers. Other jobs, such as command of mortuaries, are less popular.

Except for critical developmental jobs—for example, operations officers of tactical

units—let's allow the present occupants to stay as long as they desire and perform satisfactorily. We all know of positions where this would work—an ROTC professorship in a small town with no military facilities, or a defense attache post in a faraway country. After all, there are people who like Fort Polk and Thule and the far side of Guam. I say, find them, send them there, and let them stay. I make one stipulation: the occupant should not be promoted, while in the billet, to a grade higher than authorized.

One of the advantages of having reserves on active duty is that they know their chances of attaining senior field grade are poor. Since ticket-punching is pointless, they can maximize the personal satisfaction that derives from a secure environment. Some regulars develop the same feelings after a few years of turmoil. There are a lot of people who would trade the chance of higher rank for the satisfaction derived from seeing long-term projects through, a house fixed up for them rather than for someone else to live in, and their children graduating from the school where they started.

Yes, I know we still need people for hardship tours and police actions. But their chosen posts may still be a base where they have roots, from which they are assigned, and to which in due course they return.

Homesteaders add continuity to an organization. The less the turnover, the less likelihood of disruptive and unnecessary "reforms" by new incumbents who want to make a dramatic entrance. People who stay develop lasting relationships with other organizations and with the local community. And what better way to defeat the Peter Principle?

There are disadvantages, of course, but *don't* tell me going stale is one of them. Have you performed worse as a parent because you've been at the job for fifteen years?

Different people have different goals and different satisfaction levels. By identifying those who have found their niches, we can reduce personnel turnover and keep good people where we know they are doing good work. A transfer always involves at least two big unknowns: how will the transferee make out in his new job, and how will the replacement perform? And if you just don't consider making people happy a valid argument for my proposal, then try this one: it saves money.

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