Defense Report
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**Can We Have A Stable, Cohesive Army? New Conditions Demand New Solutions**

Gen. Edward C. Meyer, the Army's Chief of Staff, recently announced a series of proposals he hopes will improve the cohesiveness and stability within Army units. The proposals covered a wide range of solutions and included such diverse things as keeping commanders in place for longer periods, rotating soldiers to overseas assignments in platoon or company-sized units, letting soldiers spend a major part of their careers in the same regiment and designing distinctive headgear and insignia.

Old soldiers and TV viewers probably remember an Army in which the members of a platoon or squad slept in a large barracks room, ate all their meals in a company mess hall and, more often than not, shared the pleasures of the nearby town while off duty. That was an Army in which few soldiers below the grade of sergeant were married. It was an Army in which the bulk of the younger soldiers were draftees serving their country briefly and who were therefore more tolerant of the inconveniences of military life. It was an Army in which the company commander personally counted out his soldiers' pay each month and handed it to them across a blanket-covered table. None of these contributors to togetherness exist in the Army today.

Recruiters for the all-volunteer Army are competing with colleges and universities and with civilian employers for the best and the brightest of our young men and women. The recruiters are not able to sell the notion of military service on the basis of pure patriotism or as an adventure. To be competitive the recruiters have had to sell the Army as a job in which such considerations as pay, living conditions and educational opportunities are paramount. Most soldiers now live in barracks with semiprivate rooms and baths, eat in consolidated dining facilities with hundreds of almost-strangers and get their pay checcks from a finance office they never see unless a problems arises.

Having opted for this "job" in the Army, the young soldier expects to be able to marry and have children just as his civilian high school classmates have done. Today more than half the Army is married and lives either in family quarters provided by the Army or in housing in the civilian community. In either case they leave their units every night to return to "work" the next day. They don't stick around the barracks to play softball against the other companies in the battalion or engage in other unit-oriented activities.

Reactionary old soldiers might say this departure from Army life as they know it is bad, but they are probably not entirely right. The soldier, as an individual, is a lot better off today than he was in the "old Army." The real question is, "How well off is the Army with a force lacking the full measure of old-time unit cohesion?" Under today's conditions we must do everything possible to apply more glue between the soldier and his or her unit. Gen. Meyer's proposals are a step in the right direction.