

but they wouldn't go past the toothpaste.

At the end of the eight-day patrol through the jungle, we arrived in Puerto Leguizamo Naval Base where we were given five minutes to change for the final PT test—push-ups, sit-ups, and ten-kilometer run. (This was the final test to see who would say "I can't.")

After the PT test, the 36 hungry and tired Lanceros in the officer's course, and another 25 in an NCO course, were finally given a big meal and a good night's sleep. The following day we returned to Toleraida for an overnight break and the graduation ceremony.

Thus ended what I consider the best lesson a U.S. Army officer or NCO can get in how Latin American insurgents fight. Going through the Lancero course provided us with valuable experience and also a variety of ideas.

The Colombians don't like to use jungle boots in the dense jungle terrain, for example. Instead, they use knee-high rubber "gaucho" boots, which protect their feet from the constant immersion in water. If the boots fill with water, they

can be removed and emptied, and they dry quickly. And because they're rubber, they last much longer than leather boots in the constant humidity.

At night the soldiers sleep in hammocks with specially adapted mosquito nets wrapped loosely underneath. Without the nets the mosquitos would bite through the cloth all night long. The plastic shelter—approximately twice the size of a poncho liner—is suspended above the hammock to protect a soldier from the never-ending torrential downpours so that he can at least be dry for a few hours during the night.

One of the interesting things I learned in the mountain phase was how to heat a canteen cup of water Colombian style. A candle, cut in half, with both halves lit and placed beneath the cup, can heat water as efficiently as a heat tab, and it's good for at least five more cups of water. It can get wet without being ruined, and it costs seven cents. This simple discovery was a good reminder that often in our high-tech Army we forget that there may be a simpler way of doing a

job just as effectively.

As the tactical officer called out the names of my Colombian classmates and the units to which they were being assigned, nobody smiled. Nearly all were going to units heavily engaged in the counter-insurgency and counter-drug effort. Most of them had taken part in that effort before going through the course. And because of the enormous amount of money in the drug business, they knew their enemies would often be better equipped than they were.

As each of them left Toleraida to continue the long and drawn out struggle to maintain order and confront their country's enemies, they carried with them something special—the fighting spirit of Bolivar's Lanceros. The other U.S. captain and I considered ourselves fortunate to be able to share in that spirit.

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# COHORT Reenlistment

LIEUTENANT COLONEL COLE C. KINGSEED

A commander's efforts to retain high quality soldiers—our future NCO corps—require the enthusiastic involvement of all leaders in the unit, both officers and noncommissioned officers. Success is directly related to the quality of leadership they exhibit.

The single indispensable factor in all retention programs is a positive command climate that makes a soldier's first experience in the Army a generally favorable one. Commanders who conduct tough realistic training and demonstrate a genuine concern for the soldiers entrusted to their care rapidly develop

disciplined units. In turn, the soldiers take a great deal of pride in being members of the command. Bonds between the soldiers of disciplined organizations are uniformly stronger than of those in less disciplined units.

In addition, all commanders must be familiar with AR 601-280, the regulation that governs reenlistment. It succinctly outlines the duties and responsibilities of commanders and retention NCOs at all levels and discusses the reenlistment options available to the soldiers.

Nowhere, though, do battalion and company commanders face greater

reenlistment challenges than in traditional COHORT units where the soldiers all become eligible for reenlistment in an eight-month period at the end of the unit's life cycle. What can be done to prepare for this surge?

As a COHORT battalion commander, I made several key decisions early. Although some of these decisions are more controversial than others, I am convinced that they were important factors in the battalion's retention program, which succeeded in retaining 40 percent of the eligible first termers in the Active Army. Although this program focuses

primarily on retaining first termers, the same principles can be applied for mid-termers and careerists as well.

The initial step was educating the company commanders. While many senior commanders may have lived with daily reenlistment challenges when they were company commanders, that is not the case with COHORT company commanders. Since the soldiers are not eligible for reenlistment until they are within eight months of ETS (expiration term of service), company commanders generally do not face initial term quotas until that period. Consequently, they have little incentive to become familiar with reenlistment regulations. Unless a senior commander directs otherwise, reenlistment will not become a command priority until the soldiers are already in the reenlistment window. If commanders do not anticipate the surge and begin planning for it, they may not be able to handle such numbers. More important, they may not be able to pursue the soldiers' desired options as aggressively as they should.

Equally important to the education process was making certain everyone understood that reenlistment is a privilege, not a right. Commanders have a moral obligation to their country to retain high quality soldiers, and a similar obligation to bar substandard soldiers. The last thing the Army needs is to reenlist a soldier merely to meet a quota, when that soldier is likely to become a substandard NCO. The emphasis must be on quality, not quantity.

The next step was to ensure that strong leaders filled the battalion and company retention NCO positions. (A commander *must not* allow a retention NCO position to be filled by an NCO who could not quite make it in the line.) Although a company is not authorized a full-time retention NCO, the number of eligible soldiers does require one during the last year of a COHORT unit's life cycle. I strongly encouraged my unit commanders to give the retention NCOs all the time they needed to pursue reenlistment options. Within weeks, this policy paid dividends.

The commanders then began talking to the soldiers about reenlistment options, and in monthly addresses, I mentioned

reenlistment. There were a few snickers at first, but gradually soldiers asked the company representatives to explore a few options. Many asked the retention NCOs to do this in strict confidence lest their contemporaries ridicule them. It was here that the strength of the COHORT system began to surface.

As the initial inquiries came in, the retention NCOs began to target certain individuals. The first were the COHORT first termers who had achieved NCO rank, soldiers who had demonstrated a willingness and an ability to lead during their first two and one-half years of service. Most of these were highly respected by the other soldiers because they were "one of us," not cadre who were already on station when the COHORT package arrived.

### LEADERS SOLD THE IDEA

Once those junior leaders demonstrated an interest in reenlisting, the other soldiers followed. Frequently, the junior NCOs sold the reenlistment idea to the other members of their squads and teams. In fact, it was not uncommon for two or three soldiers in the same squad to select the same CONUS station of choice. In short, the most successful company reenlistment programs were those in which the junior NCOs actively participated in the retention process.

While this was happening at company level, the battalion retention NCO was giving me daily updates on the battalion's progress. Quite frankly, we managed reenlistment on a name-by-name basis. Although this process consumed an inordinate amount of my time as a battalion commander, I became knowledgeable of the options potential reenlistees wanted. Consequently, the subordinate commanders also made an additional effort to become familiar with the needs and desires of the individual soldiers.

This renewed command interest led to an immediate increase in reenlistments as more leaders began talking to the soldiers. The retention NCOs became much more aggressive in pursuing reenlistment options. Although they encountered bureaucratic red tape in some

instances, persistence proved the key. The judicious use of the commander's override program also resulted in some soldiers obtaining their units or stations of choice.

By the time our COHORT unit reached the end of its life cycle, the reenlistment results were encouraging. The battalion met or exceeded every quarterly reenlistment quota, including one quarter when the quota was 55 first termers. The battalion became the first to register more than 100 reenlistments in a six-month period. Of those reenlistments, 87 were first termers, and 75 of these chose to retain their 11B MOS. Three CONUS duty stations attracted 18 soldiers each, clearly demonstrating that COHORT soldiers retain the bonds of kinship beyond their initial duty assignment.

In summary, a COHORT unit offers numerous reenlistment challenges but provides just as many opportunities. It was my personal observation that the professional and personal bonds of COHORT soldiers were more powerful a motivation for reenlisting than the soldiers' initial reasons for joining the Army. Instead of choosing to leave military service, many decided to remain in the Army to pursue educational benefits.

In short, the recipe for success is actually quite simple: Assign quality leaders to key retention positions; make reenlistment a command priority; and prepare subordinate commanders for the reenlistment process. Then inform the soldiers of the available options and aggressively pursue the ones they select.

Above all, create a positive command climate. No soldier will reenlist if his initial tour has failed to meet his expectations, or if he perceives that his leaders are interested only in meeting quotas. Only by taking care of the individual soldier and challenging him daily will leaders succeed in retaining the Army's future NCOs.

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