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## **Making the Grade: Rank in Post-Modern Military Hierarchies**

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## **Abstract**

This paper argues that a change is required in our conception of rank to properly apply the human capital needed to fight future wars. To present the argument, the paper first reviews the history of rank; how the concept emerged in line organisations and how it was extended to staff and specialists in the industrial age. It then studies the present dilemma facing modern militaries trying to tackle the RMA in a post-modern world. In the last part of the paper, the last part of the paper proposes a novel approach to rank that can take full advantage of the RMA without losing the essence of a clear authority-responsibility-accountability chain.

## **Making the Grade: Rank in Post-Modern Military Hierarchies**

If you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even less.  
General Erik K. Shinseki<sup>1</sup>

Armed forces of developed countries share a unique institutional character stemming from their connection with the means of legitimate violence and the unlimited liability associated with their contract of employment. They universally place significant emphasis on the traditional institutional values of group solidarity, respect for rank and the chain of command in order to successfully prosecute military objectives.<sup>2</sup>

However, in our “post-traditional” or post-deferential societies, a number of traditional features of military life have been called into question suggesting the need for fundamental change. It is often difficult for the military to resist those who argue that civilian models of business efficiency can be applied successfully to the armed forces. Furthermore, the burden of proof usually rests with the military to show that changing and conforming to the shifting norms and values of wider society would likely damage operational effectiveness. Considering that adjusting to change involves the difficult task of reconstructing organizational structures, equipment, doctrine, and cultural ethos inherited from the past, it is critical that we be clear on the purpose of the change, what we stand to gain from it and what risk we are incurring doing so.<sup>3</sup>

Two areas of change that characterize post-modern militaries<sup>4</sup> are of particular interest to the issue of hierarchical relationships in the military. The first is the increasing “interpenetrability,” structurally and culturally, of civilian and military spheres. Technological change has increased the interdependence of military and civilian societies, which affects the military’s internal social structure. The roles of “military manager” and “military technologist” compete and sometimes supplant the earlier staple role of the “heroic leader.”<sup>5</sup> The second sphere of change relates to the diminishing differences, within the armed services, based on branch of service, rank, and combat versus support roles. The information technologies associated with the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) threaten to eliminate the distinctions between warrior and

nonwarrior, between officer and Non-Commissioned Member (NCM), and between service claims of sole jurisdiction regarding certain modes of warfare.<sup>6</sup>

These change “pressures” challenge a core value of military identity, i.e., our very conception of rank and hierarchy and failing to adapt may mean not being capable of capitalizing on the promises of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) the way other sectors of society profited of the information revolution that has been shaking the world for the last 30 years.

This paper will show that a change is required in our conception of rank to properly apply the human capital needed to fight future wars. To present the argument, we will first review the history of rank; how the concept emerged in line organisations and how it was extended to staff and specialists in the industrial age. We will then look at the present dilemma facing modern militaries in a post-modern world when trying to tackle the RMA. In the last part of the paper, a proposed approach to rank will be presented that can take full advantage of the RMA without losing the essence of a clear authority-responsibility-accountability chain.

## **A History of Rank<sup>7</sup>**

For the discharge of the function of leadership, the establishment of a dominant position for the leader over the led is indispensable.

General Sir John Hackett<sup>8</sup>

Rank and the structure of military authority, the key to military organization, evolved to deal with combat and combat preparation.<sup>9</sup> From the reliable “*capitain*” (headman) of the *compagnies d’ordonnance* established to deal with the free mercenary companies roaming the French countryside<sup>10</sup> to the Spanish efforts to solve the problem of unwieldy mass formations with the creation of *colunelas* (columns) commanded by a *cabo de colunela* (chief of column) or colonel,<sup>11</sup> the emergence of rank has permitted the managers of violence to bring a level of order in the chaotic environment brought about by warfare by giving a mechanism to establish authority, responsibility and accountability.<sup>12</sup>

While the ranks of captain and colonel and their respective lieutenants (the one that holds their place in their absence) were permanent, higher ranks were bestowed for the duration of a campaign only. A monarch was always the general of his country's army and he had as principal military advisor a member of the nobility normally renowned for his military prowess and referred to as the constable. Other outstanding noble warriors often carried the honorific title of marshal. While campaigning, the ruler exercised command as general while his second in command, who might or might not be the constable or one of the marshals, exercised his military function as the lieutenant general. If the monarch was absent from the field, the lieutenant general commanded in the king's name. The senior administrative officer under the operational command of the monarch was known as sergeant major general (senior servant to the general). There was no permanent military hierarchy or chain of command below king and constable. Lieutenant generals and sergeant major generals were appointed for the duration of a campaign only and subsequently reverted to their position as colonels in their permanent regiments (companies under their "regimen" or rule).<sup>13</sup>

A parallel evolution can be seen within the ship's company where the officers consisted of the captain and his lieutenants, the first lieutenant being a temporary appointment. Petty officers were experienced sailors assisting the officers aboard ship but the title wasn't a permanent rank and the men served at the captain's pleasure. Petty officers lost their rank when the crew was paid off at the end of a voyage.<sup>14</sup>

The evolution to permanent rank and the associated requirement to consider rank in appointments (i.e., the rudiments of career management) evolved in the French army of Louis XIV. By then the old title of marshal had become the permanent appellation in France for a commander of a field army in the absence of the king. Because Louis kept several armies in the field simultaneously, there appeared a requirement for and the establishment of a permanent list of officers, each with sufficient experience and distinction to warrant service as major general (the word sergeant having been dropped from the title by then), lieutenant general, or marshal of an army. In time the relative

position on this list established precedence of command. This permanent classification of an officer by rank, rather than by the temporary command that he happened to be exercising, is one of the most significant milestones in the appearance of modern military professionalism.<sup>15</sup> The reign of Louis XIV also brought uniforms furnished by the employer. Alongside the advantages accrued to esprit de corps resulting from group identification, this new practice allowed for the easy identification of who was in charge and provided commanders with instant recognition on the battlefield.<sup>16</sup>

This “professionalization” was forced in part by the growing complexity of the battlefield. The feudal military establishment was being overtaken by events. Its skill structure, closely aligned with the existing society at large, with a simple division of labor, few but rigidly defined levels of hierarchy and virtually nonexistent specialization within each stratum could deal with only a limited amount of specialization.<sup>17</sup> The introduction of new technology was putting a strain on the system forcing the leadership to rely on civilian “entrepreneurs” to operate advanced technology on the battlefield. Albert Manucy, in his *Artillery Through the Ages* relates how the concept of dealing with “contractors” on the battlefield is not a new one:

For the artillerist generally, this [the early 1500s] was a difficult period. The actual commander of artillery was usually a soldier; but transport and drivers were still hired, and the drivers naturally had a layman’s attitude toward battle. Even the gunners, those civilian artists who owed no special duty to the prince, were concerned mainly over the safety of their pieces – and their hides, since artillerists who stuck with their guns were apt to be picked off by an enemy musketeer.<sup>18</sup>

Artillery and other “support” functions were militarized in the late 1600s at the time of Louis XIV’s reign<sup>19</sup> introducing into the uniformed service the concept of technical expertise as distinct from war fighting expertise. The transforming of the aristocratic feudal military establishment into a professional armed force is therefore directly linked to the technological development of war and the growth of industrialism.<sup>20</sup> As land warfare got more and more complicated with the advent of industrialization the proportion of technical experts in the force over time grew by leaps and bounds.

In 1861, 98 percent of British soldiers were in what we now consider the combat arms (infantry, cavalry, artillery and engineers) and 2 percent in the military train (transport) and the medical services. Men seconded in small numbers from the fighting arms performed most support tasks or logistical duties. The American Civil War experience is similar with 93 percent of soldiers in combat-related tasks while only 7 percent had mechanical, maintenance or administrative tasks. By the Second World War – because of its long duration and the military’s extensive reliance on advanced technology – a comprehensive system had been adopted for defining skill requirements culminating in a detailed occupational classification for all positions in military units. Comparing the 1954 numbers to those of 90 years prior gives a significantly different picture with only 29 percent of soldiers in combat related duties and 71 percent in specialized support trades. Furthermore, while some of the new support duties required only a modest educational background, most of them called for levels of education and mental capability theretofore required only of officers and never before associated with the traditional image of enlisted personnel.<sup>21</sup>

Armies have paralleled civilian groups in experiencing a sharp reduction in the relative size of non-specialized occupational groups, and this has had a profound effect on organizational authority. Morris Janowitz, the pioneer of military sociology, has studied the effect on organizational authority of this growing specialization. He compared aristocratic and modern professional military organizations and analyzed the division of labor – the skill structure – in both establishments. He found that whereas military authority was definitely ascriptive in the aristocratic military establishment, i.e., derived from tradition, custom and social position, an ever greater reliance on criteria of *achievement* as the basis for allocating positions of authority imposed itself as the aristocratic officer began to be displaced by middle-class technicians on a battlefield where artillery and more elaborate logistic planning required that the military be a trained and a full-time occupation. Janowitz demonstrated how “as the simple division of labor gave way to a complex pattern of specialization, the number of ranks increased and the staff officer emerged as a specialist in planning and coordination.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, for the military establishment to accomplish its multiple goals on the modern battlefield, the self-conception of the warrior type, or the “heroic leader” central to the military profession for so long, required the incorporation of the new roles of “military manager” and “military technologist” and the development and maintenance of a balance between these different military types.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, there appeared a deep source of organizational strain in military organizations. As the growing number and complexity of technical specialists endeavored to operate under the formally prescribed lines of authority, developed for the simpler units of past centuries, the authority structure could not fully align with its skill structure.<sup>24</sup>

This organizational authority strain was compounded by a second source of tension in the military establishment flowing from the continuous effort to develop a system of ranks that could correspond to the new complex skill structure. Traditionally, the military rank system had been a pyramid with direct and continuous clear-cut lines of authority from top to bottom. However, an expansion of the middle ranks has accompanied the proliferation of skills discussed above transforming the pyramid into a “flask-like” shape hierarchy and giving the impression of an inflation of rank. It also created the image of a weakening of authority, since rank was no longer held on the basis of the number of subordinates commanded but also because of technical skills.

As with the reduction of non-specialized occupational groups discussed above, this escalation of rank characterized by an expansion of the middle strata is typical of organizations that have grown in complexity and where the allocation of authority is determined through achievement rather than ascriptive criteria. It follows that “authority has not been so much weakened as transformed.”<sup>25</sup> It is no longer a vertical exercise of authority between higher and lower echelons and now more often relates to lateral coordination and cooperation. The task of higher echelons becomes that of setting the conditions within which the middle strata of specialists can coordinate their efforts.

It appears that the two sources of strain in the organizational authority of the modern military establishment, its rank structure and its skill structure, reflect the same

fundamental problem. Whereas the need for specialization engendered an increase in the number of ranks and occupations, the requirement for specialist coordination has resulted in an expansion of staff toiling in the middle ranks of officers and non-commissioned members (NCM). The skill structure and rank structure have thus converged in reality, putting even more stress on the traditional chain of command.<sup>26</sup> Whereas other professions could readily adapt and evolve their organizational authority to reflect the growing specialization required by industrialization, military establishments resisted the trend. Confronted with the demands of their unlimited liability contract and their authority-responsibility-accountability chain, they never reconciled the imperatives of the skill structure with those of the chain of command. In the words of Janowitz;

As long as imponderables weigh heavy in estimating military outcomes and as long as the “fighter” spirit is required to face combat, the military rejects the civilian engineer as its professional model. Of course, the engineer is held in high esteem, but the ideal image continues to be the strategic commander, not the military technician. It is the image of the leader, motivated by national patriotism and not by personal monetary gain, who is capable of organizing the talents of specialists for all types of contingencies.<sup>27</sup>

That is why Huntington, in his seminal work *The Soldier and the State*, argues that of all the types of specialists that make up modern military forces, only those who “manage violence” are to be considered true military professionals and given the responsibility of command. “Individuals, such as doctors... belong to the officer corps in its capacity as an administrative organization of the state, but not in its capacity as a professional body.”<sup>28</sup>

## **The Present Dilemma**

Rank can be used for many things: more pay, more status, recognition of high technology, skill, etc, but it is required for only a small number of reasons, the fundamental one being to ensure discipline in the broadest sense, i.e., to ensure the effective accomplishment of missions by group.

Project Management Office  
Trade Advancement for Skill and Knowledge<sup>29</sup>

Despite the many “social” innovations of the last century, the tension between the traditional role of rank in establishing a clear chain of command - the guarantor of the

responsibility, authority and accountability chain – and its function as recognition of the skill structure required to wage modern war has not diminished. If anything it has grown. With the maintenance and manning of new weapons requiring an ever-greater reliance on specialist technicians, the requirements for research, development, and technical maintenance continues to weaken the organizational boundary between the military and the nonmilitary. The counter-trend, the greater effort by the military establishment to develop and train officers and NCMs with scientific and engineering backgrounds suffers from two ills, it cannot keep up with the current pace of technological innovation and the specialists so trained remain hard to integrate into the rank structure.<sup>30</sup>

The trials and tribulations of the Project Management Office – Trade Advancement for Skill and Knowledge (PMO TASK) which was formed in 1987 to “develop for implementation an integrated rank, occupation progression and reward policy framework for NCMs”<sup>31</sup> offers a good window into the present dilemma.

Even as the middle ranks swelled with staff officers and specialists, the early experience in the days of conscription and mass armies still distinguished between rank and occupation progression. The transition to all-volunteer forces however, with a requirement to offer competitive compensation, witnessed growing pressures to couple rank and occupation progression since compensation was firmly tied to rank. In Canada, as a result of the Minister’s Manpower Study (Men) (MMS(Men)), the two were fused in 1966. This sparked controversy at the time and has remained unpopular with commanders who contend that “a highly proficient person does not necessarily make a competent leader.”<sup>32</sup> And that “technical specialists with few or no requirements for leadership skills are difficult to integrate into the existing system where rank and skill are linked in a lock-step fashion.”<sup>33</sup>

The CF NCM rank structure that evolved following unification, and which is still with us, totals nine levels between Pte (Basic) and CWO. While all occupations share the same structure, its use has evolved differently for “operators” and “maintainers”:

The maintainer has two level of trainee – Private (Basic) and Private (Trained); three levels of Journeyman – Corporal, Master Corporal and Sergeant; four levels of supervision – Master Corporal, Sergeant, Warrant Officer and Master Warrant Officer; and two levels of management – Master Warrant Officer and Chief Warrant Officer. For the operator there are three levels of basic operator – Private (Basic), Private (Trained) and Corporal; three supervisory levels – Corporal, Master Corporal and Sergeant; and three levels of management – Warrant Officer, Master Warrant Officer and Chief Warrant Officer.<sup>34</sup>

The aim of PMO TASK was to come up with a compensation scheme for lateral progression for technical specialist that would permit rank to be returned to its original use as a designator of supervisory responsibility. This would also allow for the mid-career recruitment of trained specialist, thereby easing the strain of internal technical schools. A Development Study Report was submitted in 1989<sup>35</sup> and work continued on the concept into the early 1990s but the project was never approved. Rumors as to the reason for its demise implied that the study recommendations could not be implemented because they were going against the warrior ethos. The proposed compensation structure would see members of the same rank getting better paid the further away from the battlefield their employment entailed.

This Canadian experience is not the only one where an attempt to introduce lateral trade advancement separate from line rank has proven inconclusive. Specialized craftsmen needed by nineteenth-century armies were not easy to attract in an economy chronically short of skilled workers. “Armies tried to lure such men by offers of noncommissioned rank and significantly higher pay than line personnel of similar rank received.”<sup>36</sup> Later, during World War II, the US Army introduced technician grades where men of a given grade earned the same pay and wore the same insignia as equivalent NCMs except for a small "T" centred under the chevrons which indicated that they had no command authority over troops. This then evolved into the specialist ranks, pay grades of E-4 to E-7 but was phased out, the last vestige of which is today's "specialist," pay grade E-4.<sup>37</sup>

It is not only in technical matters that innovations impose themselves on the military but also in matters of organization and human relations. And it is probably in this area that the military has the most difficulty adapting. While some organizational adaptations of

the military anticipate developments in civilian society, like in the concept of lifelong learning,<sup>38</sup> other ideas like the “delaying” of the hierarchy prove harder to internalize. Discerning whether the reluctance is due to bona fide operational requirements or if it is a holdover of existing culture is particularly difficult. Critics of the military’s slow pace at adopting the RMA blame a culture more enamored with the military "way of life" than operational effectiveness. As Andrew J. Bacevich remarks:

To an extent that soldiers themselves are usually unwilling to acknowledge, the daily rewards of military life revolve around ancient rituals of status... every officer worth his salt aspires to battalion command... Yet the information revolution has already sounded the death knell for such middle management positions in the private sector. Lean and flexible "flat" organizations outperform those modeled along hierarchical lines.<sup>39</sup>

From the military “operator’s” point of view, articulating a "vision" and developing consensus and establishing the conditions for tasks to be executed by small teams is not a problem so long as the chain of authority-responsibility-accountability is clear.

Therefore, Bacevich’s claim that “the organizational and leadership principles...defining the RMA are likely to make the military's elaborate hierarchy of rank redundant - and may even see the cult of command eclipsed by mere technicians, analysts, and programmers”<sup>40</sup> is not seen as a serious challenge.

The unease remains however, on how to evolve rank and the chain of command to take full advantage of the RMA without losing the essence of their primordial function. So far our response has been more of the same, but irreconcilable stresses are appearing while technological and demographic trends show no sign of abating. Compensation tied to rank forces us to either over-rank our specialists or underpay them and continue to face a chronic shortfall spending an inordinate amount of resources in the process to train batch after batch of journeyman only to see them leave for more competitive pastures.

Furthermore, because we insist on growing our own talent, and cannot come to terms with recruiting sergeants, majors or colonels, we deny ourselves the flexibility of bringing in technical expertise at the right level to take advantage of the career mobility desired by the participants of today’s work force. This mid-career entry/departure

mobility would allow us to streamline our knowledge management infrastructure and capitalize on some of the fast moving information technology on which the RMA relies.

## **A Post-Modern Rank Structure Proposal**

Being right often matters less than throwing out good ideas to be proved wrong.

Ernest Gellner, Social Anthropologist<sup>41</sup>

The conception of rank that we have inherited seems to be at the center of the difficulty here. While assigning the quality of permanency to rank during Louis XIV's reign clearly launched militaries on the path to professionalism, it appears now to stand in the way of "progress." It is all the baggage we associate with rank (maturity, tenure, etc) that make direct recruiting of sergeants, majors and colonels unworkable and it is our inability to see beyond rank, when looking at pay and benefits, that make devising a competitive compensation package virtually impossible. It is perhaps time to reevaluate the concept to see if it really meets our needs. Rejecting rank outright, as a thing of the past that has outlived its usefulness, would be irresponsible. The Chinese People's Liberation Army actually abolished rank in 1964, in a move toward radical egalitarianism that foreshadowed the Cultural Revolution, only to reinstate it in 1988. The once denounced "feudal, capitalist and revisionist" system appears to have been critical to a modern, professional force.<sup>42</sup>

If rank cannot be abolished, how can it be changed to fit the new reality? The concept of power and how it relates to authority is of interest here. Sociologists that have studied the issue see a distinction between the two. If "authority is the *potentiality* to influence based on a position... power is the actual ability to influence based on a number of factors including, of course, organizational position."<sup>43</sup> Clegg and Dunkerley recognize four sources of power: (1) authority based power, already mentioned, which is rooted in the ability to coerce; (2) rules based power where the power relationship has been internalized through socialization; (3) exchanged based power where each party has something the other(s) also value and want; and (4) situational skill advantage power where the dependency of an organization on expert knowledge held by a few gives them

power out of proportion to their formal authority.<sup>44</sup> Whereas members of the chain of command have a monopoly of the first two sources of power and a competitive advantage on the third one, the fourth source is clearly in the hand of the various specialists in the organization. Given the growing dependency of the outcome of military operations to the expert knowledge held by specialists, one can surmise that extending the concept of rank to them (when it was clearly originally designed specifically for line positions) was probably instituted to “mollify their fists” and ensure that no “us vs. them” situation ensued.

It follows that whatever proposal is offered, some characteristics must continue in the new system. Unity of command and a clear chain of authority-responsibility-accountability must be traceable in the new system. We must also be careful of the danger of creating a situation that would foster a “us vs. them” mentality either by segregating groups or by introducing divisive policies: “a military pay policy which splits military occupations or skills into high and low pay categories and is contrary to its basic corporate value of horizontal equality is invariably destined to create divisive social pressures.”<sup>45</sup> Finally, the advantage of the visibility of rank accorded by the military uniform should be kept.

The most promising possibility for adapting to the new requirements is to decouple rank from some of the attributes that are linked to it at the present. Military rank is used to concurrently indicate: authority; level of responsibility; level of skills; pay; and, status.<sup>46</sup> Rank is used to allocate authority, responsibility and status in the chain of command – line positions – and to recognize skills, responsibility and status in the technical chain – staff positions. Whereas the attributes required to operate and be successful in one field are not necessarily congruent with what is required in the other, the two are used together mainly to ensure the transportability or comparability of status between the two.<sup>47</sup>

The idea of status is a critical one and relates to the issue of power discussed above. Janowitz’s observations on the distribution of status in military organizations are relevant to our purpose here.

Status systems are required to regulate and control the tensions and conflicts generated by competition among differing systems of authority. Authority, ascribed or achieved, does not operate solely because of the ultimate sanctions that an officer can mobilize. Rather, in any organization, civilian or military, authority systems operate on a day-to-day basis or fail to operate because of the status – that is, the prestige and respect – the officers have.<sup>48</sup>

The military is extremely sensitive to status and has evolved an elaborate system for bestowing it on its members. Distinction between officers and NCMs, regulars and reservists, line versus staff, or combat versus support are all part of this scheme. Status however is not static or uniformly distributed or perceived equally by all sectors. A study by Raymond Mack<sup>49</sup> highlights the well-known observation that at the lower echelons of the Air Force, flying has more prestige than decision-making. But he has found that this ranking of prestige does not extend throughout the hierarchy and that officers have to readjust their perspective to new professional requirements as they rise in rank because “although a combat ideology pervades the highest echelons, the prestige of decision-making and planning increases, the higher the officer advances.”<sup>50</sup> Status is also not necessarily universally tied to rank as the example of the German General Staff in Moltke’s Army shows. General Staff Officers, relatively junior in rank, were assigned to Divisions, Corps and Army Headquarters to be “junior partners in command” and often carried more prestige than the senior commanders they were supporting<sup>51</sup>

Decoupling rank from the many things that came to be associated with it can be done if we do away with rank itself, where it is not needed. Since formal military rank originated to establish the clear chain of authority-responsibility-accountability required to deal with the application of military power (i.e., combat) then rank needs to be retained for personnel occupying line positions. However, as with the practice before Louis XIV’s reign, let those ranks be temporary so that upon relinquishing command and moving on to staff duties, an officer or NCM would become a generic staff officer with no associated military rank.

Staff positions could then be better targeted and have the right officer/NCM in the job allowing even the lateral entry of outside specialists. Some staff position qualification

requirements could include command experience at the sub-unit or unit level, if a bona fide requirement exists, but the position would not be tied to a specific rank thus giving the system much more flexibility in filling them with the right officer. As an example, on completion of company command, an officer with an advanced degree specialization in peacekeeping policy could be given the job of Director of Peacekeeping Policy (presently a Colonel's position), rather than being underemployed elsewhere, because his academic credentials and practical experience make him/her the best person for the job. Should that officer be subsequently chosen to command a unit in the field he/she would then receive the temporary rank of lieutenant colonel and move to that position. This would not be seen as a reversion in rank because no formal military rank was held while on staff.

Quick promotion on the staff side (not in terms of rank but in terms of position occupied) would not be seen as competing with the status of officers spending time in line positions and conversely, higher achievement in line positions (higher temporary rank) would not be a direct indicator of staff level appointments. Thus, status portability would no longer be an issue since staff and line would no longer have rank comparability. Status within line positions – where people still wear rank – would remain generally the same while the status of staff positions would have to readjust, not by the last rank held by the person occupying it, but just like in all other civilian bureaucracies, by its importance to the overall mission of that particular branch. This would certainly not eliminate rank consciousness in the staff. Even in the absence of rank, directors would clearly have higher status than section heads. That is the way civilian hierarchies work; rank is still present but it is not as invasive and, more importantly, it does not have transportability with line ranks.

Pay and other forms of compensation will of necessity be more complicated than the present system and require a more personalized approach since all the people in the same line rank or staff category would not necessarily be paid the same. A more personalized approach to remuneration based on personal “worth” rather than position filled would have to be devised and implemented. This change appears intuitively correct. One

cannot have a flexible post-modern approach to rank and an industrial age, one size fits all, approach to compensation. Furthermore the concept is not new within the department since Defense Scientists are remunerated based on personal development rather than for the position they occupy.

Considering the three hundred years of culture built around our current conception of rank, this is a radical change proposal. It is no more radical however, than the 17<sup>th</sup> century idea of keeping a permanent list of officers suitable for appointment at the head of Louis XIV's armies and the return to professional armies after an absence of twelve centuries in Europe. This proposal not only protects the chain of authority-responsibility-accountability and the visibility of rank by continuing to stack the sources of power on the chain of command's side, it adds significant flexibility in the movement of staff talent and expertise to where and when it is required. It does so without alienating those in the organization that hold "expert knowledge" power and avoids an "us vs. them" atmosphere since all are treated the same vis-à-vis rank and status but each receives personalized attention in matters dealing with compensation. This would put us in good stead to maximize the use of the latest the RMA has to offer and launch us well on our way culturally to be capable to approach a "delayering" of our chain of command.

## **Conclusion**

Rank evolved to enable managers of violence to bring a level of order to the chaotic environment of war by providing a mechanism to establish authority, responsibility and accountability when dealing with combat and combat preparation. However, the growing complexity of the battlefield, brought about by industrialization, saw the requirement to introduce, into the uniformed service, the concept of technical expertise as distinct from war fighting expertise. The emergence of the staff officer as a specialist in planning and coordination and the introduction of other technical specialists put significant stress on the traditional chain of command.

Despite many “social” innovations and attempts to reconcile the two, the tension between the traditional role of rank in establishing a clear chain of command, and its function as recognition of the skill structure required to wage modern war has continued to increase. Even today, the diminishing differences within the armed services based on rank or role and the continuing weakening of organizational boundaries between the military and the nonmilitary ensuing from increased “interpenetrability” of civilian and military spheres indicate that it is not only in technical matters that we need to pursue innovations but more importantly in matters of organization and human relations. However, treating this challenge as the opportunity it could be to seize on the RMA seems unattainable because of the divide our current conception of rank perpetuates between managers of violence and support occupations.

While many stratagems have been tried, like the introduction of lateral progression or the differencing of rank types, a workable solution has yet to be found to reconcile the two uses of rank. The idea presented here of decoupling rank from some of the many attributes associated with it, like skill or pay level, is the only way to move beyond the current impasse. However, it appears that that can only be done if we do away with rank itself, where it is not needed.

While the purpose of this change and what we stand to gain from it is clear, considering its impact on organizational structures and our cultural ethos, it is critical we assess the risks we are incurring doing so. Because rank is retained in the chain of command there appears to be very little risk for the authority-responsibility-accountability chain. The more probable risks lie in a possible widening of the “us vs. them” chasm between “operators” and “maintainers” and in a predictable visceral rejection of the proposal by “managers of violence” who will blame an egalitarian agenda for this “attack” on the institution of the chain of command. The issue of a widening chasm is unlikely to develop since this is exactly what this proposal is tackling. With everybody “losing” their permanent rank, specialists are unlikely to feel targeted or isolated. Manifestation of the second risk possibility is more likely.

Culture and the weight of history will make this proposal hard to adopt and implement with operators. People who have served a fuemt emmemm

Revolution in Military Affairs. Our current conception of rank indeed needs to change in order to properly apply the human capital needed to fight future wars.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> General Eric K. Shinseki, "Chief of Staff Remarks (As Prepared)," AUSA Conference, Nov. 2001; available online at <http://www.army.mil/leaders/CSA/speeches/20011108CSAREMARKSAUSA.htm> ; accessed 10 June 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Dandeker, "The Military in Democratic Societies," *Society* 38, no. 6 (September/October 2001): 20.

<sup>3</sup> Dandeker, 16-17

<sup>4</sup> Academics identify five major organizational changes that characterize the post-modern military: (1) The increasing "interpenetrability" of civilian and military spheres, both structurally and culturally; (2) The diminution of differences within the armed services based on branch of service, rank, and combat versus support roles; (3) The change in the military purpose from fighting wars to missions that would not be considered military in the traditional sense; (4) Military forces are used more in international missions authorized (or at least legitimated) by entities beyond the nation state; and, (5) Internationalization of military forces themselves like the emergence of the Eurocorps, and multinational and bi-national divisions in NATO countries. See Charles C. Moskos, John Allen Williams, and David R. Segal, "Armed Forces after the Cold War," in *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces After the Cold War*, Charles C. Moskos, John Allen Williams and David R. Segal eds. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Kellett, *Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle* (Boston, MA: Kluwer Nijhoff Publishing, 1982), 61.

<sup>6</sup> A.J. Bacevich, "Tradition Abandoned: America's Military in a New Era," *National Interest*, no 48 (Summer 1997): 23.

<sup>7</sup> While the history of rank in professional armies properly dates back to antiquity, the traditions were lost in the middle ages. For that reason, and because of the link with contemporary appellations, I have chosen to limit this quick overview of the history of rank to the modern era.

<sup>8</sup> General Sir John Hackett, *The Profession of Arms* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1983), 216.

<sup>9</sup> Morris Janowitz and Roger W. Little, *Sociology and the Military Establishment*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1974), 40.

<sup>10</sup> R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Harper Encyclopaedia of Military History: From 3500 B.C. to the Present*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 443-444.

<sup>11</sup> Dupuy, 500.

<sup>12</sup> While the concepts authority, responsibility and accountability can be taken separately and are all required at one time or another (and in one form or another) during routine activities of any organization, the potential finality of military operations and the associated consequences for the political regime of the belligerents require that all three be centralized and accounted for through the chain of command. See Department of National Defense, B-GL-300-000/FP-000 *Canada's Army: We Stand on Guard for Thee* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1998), 41.

<sup>13</sup> Dupuy, 500-501 and 577. See also Martin van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 34.

<sup>14</sup> Jim Garamone, "Insignia: The Way You Tell Who's Who in the Military" *American Forces Information Service*; on-line at [http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Nov1999/n11221999\\_9911224.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Nov1999/n11221999_9911224.html) ; accessed 10 June 2003.

<sup>15</sup> In due course, the national general army lists were extended to the grades of colonel and below. See Dupuy, 577. See also Hackett, 64

<sup>16</sup> Hackett, 69. On the importance of the uniform as a symbol which displays a role, see Stewart Clegg and David Dunkerley, *Organization, Class and Control* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 447.

<sup>17</sup> Janowitz, 44.

<sup>18</sup> Albert Manucy, *Artillery Through the Ages* (Washington, 1949). Originally cited in Dupuy, 492.

<sup>19</sup> Dupuy, 577.

<sup>20</sup> Janowitz, 45.

<sup>21</sup> Kellett, 59-61. See also the chart provided in Janowitz, 47.

<sup>22</sup> Janowitz, 44-46.

<sup>23</sup> Janowitz, 38-39.

<sup>24</sup> Janowitz, 47-48.

<sup>25</sup> Janowitz, 53.

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- <sup>26</sup> Janowitz, 51-54.
- <sup>27</sup> Janowitz, 37-38.
- <sup>28</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 12.
- <sup>29</sup> Department of National Defence, Project Management Office for Trade Advancement for Skill and Knowledge (PMO TASK), *Canadian Forces Rank Rationalization Non-Commissioned Members* (Ottawa, 16 Nov 1987), 28.
- <sup>30</sup> Janowitz, 35
- <sup>31</sup> Department of National Defence, Project Management Office for Trade Advancement for Skill and Knowledge (PMO TASK), *Project Directive* (Ottawa, 23 Dec 1987), 2.
- <sup>32</sup> PMO TASK (16 Nov 1987), 1
- <sup>33</sup> Department of National Defence, Project Management Office for Trade Advancement for Skill and Knowledge (PMO TASK), *Canadian Forces Future Trends and the TASK Concept* (Ottawa, 15 Nov 1987), 6.
- <sup>34</sup> PMO TASK (16 Nov 1987), 3.
- <sup>35</sup> Department of National Defence, Project Management Office for Trade Advancement for Skill and Knowledge (PMO TASK), *Development Study Report* (Ottawa, May 1989)
- <sup>36</sup> Kellett, 59-61.
- <sup>37</sup> An Army Specialist is in the same pay grade as an Army Corporal, but the Corporal has more authority than the Specialist. See Garamone, "Insignia..." , The idea of bestowing specialist with distinct titles and insignia to show they are excluded from military command is also seen in other militaries. See Huntington, 12.
- <sup>38</sup> The continued need for retraining personnel from operational to managerial positions and from older to newer techniques has led to a more rational spreading of higher education throughout the career of the military officer, rather than the concentrated dosage typical of the civilian in graduate or professional school. See Janowitz, 38
- <sup>39</sup> Bacevich, 24
- <sup>40</sup> Bacevich, 24. More balanced critics of the "industrial age hierarchies" do not see technicians, analysts, and programmers replacing the chain of command but do see a requirement to reform an archaic and top-heavy organization. See in particular William A. Owen, *Lifting the Fog of War* (New York, NY: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2000), 23.
- <sup>41</sup> *The Economist* Vol 337, no 7942 (25 November 1995), 94. "Ernest Gellner Obituary"
- <sup>42</sup> Michael S. Serrill, "Sprucing Up the Troops," *Time* Vol 132, no 2 (11 Jul 1988): 30.
- <sup>43</sup> W. G. Bennis et al, "Authority, Power and the Ability to Influence," *Human Relations*, no. 11 (1958): 144. Originally quoted in Clegg and Dunkerley, 434.
- <sup>44</sup> Clegg and Dunkerley, 445-450.
- <sup>45</sup> Department of National Defence, Project Management Office for Trade Advancement for Skill and Knowledge (PMO TASK), *PMO TASK Discussion Paper on the Canadian Forces Reward System* (Ottawa, 17 May 1988), 44.
- <sup>46</sup> Since career progression in peacetime militaries is relatively stable and slow, progression in rank has come to be associated with wisdom and maturity. We must be careful however not to generalize from this apparent norm. Wartime militaries are more concerned with battlefield success than with time in rank. Twenty five year old Commanding Officers and twenty one year old Regimental Sergeant-Majors were not rare in WWII.
- <sup>47</sup> I use the term "transportability" rather than transferability here because rank in the staff was "carried over" from the line position newly appointed staff officers held prior to their appointment. I therefore consider that they brought the rank with them rather than the rank having been transferred from one medium to the next. See van Creveld, 73
- <sup>48</sup> Janowitz, 54-55
- <sup>49</sup> Raymond W. Mack, "The prestige System of an Air Base: Squadron Rankings and Morale," *American Sociological Review*, vol 19 (June 1954), 281-287.
- <sup>50</sup> Janowitz, 55-56
- <sup>51</sup> Gunther E. Rothenberg, "Moltke, Schlieffen, and the Doctrine of Strategic Envelopment," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, Peter Paret ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 301-302.

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