

### **Triathletes, Not Pentathletes Yet: A Response to “Sorry, Pentathlete Wasn’t on the Syllabus.”**

**Patrick McKinney**

First, I largely agree with Crispin Burke ([SWJ, 24 January 2009](#)) concerning instruction at Captains Career Courses and the requirements of junior Army leaders, however, since his attendance to Aviation Captains Career Course (AVCCC) in early 2007, positive changes in other CCC’s have been implemented. CCC graduates are likely not the Pentathletes the Army needs, but are closer to Triathletes than single sport amateurs. I am currently enrolled in the Military Intelligence Captains Career Course (MICCC), and cannot speak for changes in other branches, but will attempt to address issues Burke raised in his piece.

Burke is correct that by and large, “the Pentathlete is getting lip service” but is it unrealistic to expect the CCC to graduate experts in all areas. It is more reasonable, and a better starting point, to graduate Triathletes that are competent in a larger set of skills, with a foundation that will allow them to grow into Army Pentathletes. Due to deployments, garrison OPTEMPO, and personal experiences, Captains entering the various CCC are more experienced than CCC students in previous years, and need the CCC to assist them in their progression as Captains. The CCC curriculum needs to adjust to this reality, and from my experience thus far at the MICCC, those changes are being made.

Having not attended the AVCCC, I cannot speak to its instruction, but from Burke’s description, I understand his frustration. As a Field Artillery Lieutenant at the Officer Basic Course, we used the JANUS system he describes to simulate High Intensity Conflict (HIC) while conducting Fire Support training. It suited the basic fire planning instruction we received, but I too have trouble imagining its relevance with the current COIN training environment. However, instruction in HIC MDMP and IPB teaches fundamentals which can then be adjusted as needed by operational reality. The Army has also updated its OPFOR doctrine to better reflect current and likely future threats with the FM 7-100 series. A quick read reveals an enemy quite close to what we are facing.

This is the logic used by the MICCC, where traditional HIC IPB and MDMP are used to teach doctrine. Once CPTs understand the products and processes, they apply them to Targeting and COIN blocks of instruction later in the course. The instruction is Practical Exercise focused, and

the PE's we conducted varied from HIC versus a Soviet style force to an Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps type force. Additionally, OPD's and speakers are used to cover material not addressed in other blocks. As a former Artilleryman, I am impressed with the instruction and material thus far.

We too spent many hours drawing on acetate, plotting on maps, but in the end, it taught my class how to make the products. We received orientation training on some parts of the new CPOF structure, but were told that future classes are likely to do much, if not all, instruction on CPOF platforms. I may be among the last Captains who enjoyed the pleasures of drawing a Modified Combined Obstacle Overlay (MCOO) on acetate. Future classes are moving digital, and will maximize the technologies available to the Army. (That said, and having worked with CPOF, acetate is a quick and cheap alternative when needed, and I will keep a roll in my shop.)

Though I agree with the necessity, understanding, "strategic thought... politics and economics..." as Burke argues may be a bridge too far for the CCC, which is only 5-6 months long and already filled with instruction. Self professional development, along with development from senior officers, is a better avenue to address these issues. If an Army officer is not interested in reading journals, books, or even the newspaper, it is unlikely that the CCC or later ILE attendance will change that. The MICCC has implemented a Seminar Program, which officers may voluntarily join, that requires additional readings, weekly discussions, and a seminar paper for publication. Other CCC's can emulate this method to expand its students' minds, but adding additional courses on Strategy, History, Politics, etc... may be too much. Another method could be an additional required reading list, using the CSA's list, or COIN, HIC, etc... as a theme.

Having done MDMP as a Battalion S4 and Battalion S2 in garrison settings, I agree that it can be an overwhelming and time consuming event. That said, when done right, it creates a better end product. At the MICCC I did my first full IPB with products, and the resulting war gaming showed that it works, when done. MICCC instructors emphasize that you cannot do an abbreviated MDMP if you do not know the full MDMP, and this is correct. Burke is correct that the current situation may not allow the time or resources for full MDMP, but if done in abbreviated form with key products, it may still serve a positive purpose. And though predicting the future is often useless, we may return to HIC in the future, which could better suit a systems approach, at least at higher levels. A Platoon Leader briefing off a MRE box will probably not change, regardless of higher staff processes though.

A common complaint amongst Captains, regardless of branch, is the uncertainty of their career paths. As an Artillery Lieutenant, I served in an actual Artillery position for only three months. The remainder was spent doing convoy security and staff work. Many Captains graduating from CCC are still being assigned Military Transition Team (MiTT) duty, adding further frustration to their career goals. Burke is right that our junior leaders should be shown greater career options, but the Needs of the Army reality is that there are currently not a lot of options, at least at the junior Captain level. The MICCC has OPD's, speakers, and recruiting briefs on different paths available, but the reality is that the Branch Manager will offer what he/she offers. Due to the high number of MiTT assignments, MICCC has begun a MiTT training block for those Captains

requiring it. The cost, however, is that those Captains may miss BN/BDE level training scenarios that will help them in the following five to ten years, versus the immediate one year assignment.

Should one choose a career, the Army does offer a variety of opportunities for training, schooling, and performance in other fields. The issue is that they come later in a career, and can often lock an officer in a job or field. Burke uses the FAO program as his example. It is an interesting field, and from what I have read and heard, a highly rewarding one. Because of a lack of promotions, the Army single-tracked FAO, preventing an officer from returning to their original branch. From the Army's perspective, this makes sense, as many years and dollars are invested in making a FAO. Unfortunately for units, this keeps a qualified officer with unique skills and capabilities out of the fighting force. Unfortunately for the individuals, it is an all-in endeavor, as they will likely never see another command and spend the majority of their careers away from Soldiers. The initial Critical Skills Retention Bonus (CSRB) offered Functional Areas as an option, and many took it. It was not offered the following year, showing that in fact, too many chose it. The Army is short officers, and needs them in operations and units, thus it must perform a delicate balancing act. Dual tracking would increase the number of pentathletes, but would keep Functional Areas short. Single tracking fills Functional Areas, but keeps pentathletes out of operational units.

Another area that Burke stresses, and that I agree with, is emphasizing advanced civilian schooling (ACS) for advanced degrees. If every officer was guaranteed one to two years to pursue a relevant advanced degree instead of a monetary bonus, it would enhance the skills and capabilities of the officer corps, and likely increase retention and satisfaction. The argument against consists of the monetary and manpower costs. Can the Army afford to send 1000 officers to school each year? Can the Army afford to pull 1000 officers from units each year? Those are answers above my level, but pushing ACS for all officers would help create pentathletes. To add to Burke's focus on ACS, I would add the much touted language training need. Giving all officers foreign language training would definitely build pentathletes, but again the costs in dollars, time, and people are large. Rosetta Stone, cited as addressing this need, is a good product, but unless individuals possess the discipline and motivation, and are given hours each day to train, it is not a full solution.

One issue not covered by Burke that needs attention is Command Training. I cannot speak to the other courses, but as MI is now not command oriented, meaning command is not required for promotion (different debate), the MICCC does not really address Company Command. The Captains Career Course Common Core (C5) attempts to cover this shortfall in instruction with online training that focuses on staff and command issues and requirements. Though not always user friendly, there is a lot of good information and instruction in the classes. The downside is that they must be done online, ideally prior to CCC attendance, and they are very time intensive. Small group instruction works well to teach MI specific skills, and would be preferred for Command related classes as well. The C5 fills a void, but is not the preferred method in my opinion.

The goal of the MICCC is to produce capable Battalion and Brigade S2's. Having served as a Battalion S2 prior to attendance, the course definitely would have been invaluable to prepare me for intelligence staff work and operations. The course is moving in the right direction, and is adjusting to feedback from students and the field. There is room for improvement, but it is refreshing and reassuring to hear that changes are already in the works for future classes. Being an Army Captain is a privilege and is among the best jobs in the world, but it is not an easy job right now. Burke is correct that education and career paths must adjust to retain experienced and battle tested junior officers, and since his attendance at the CCC in 07, the Army has made changes. The MICCC is producing Triathletes; maybe not Pentathletes, but that is still a positive trend.

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