

# **Thoughts, Ideas, and Suggestions on How to Build a Stronger Force in the AGR Program of the Army Reserve, a Needed Renaissance**

by Command Sgt. Major Edward Roderiques, Jr.

The career success of some U.S. Army Reserve senior enlisted leaders serving in the Active Guard Reserve (AGR) Program has been impeded by problems stemming as much from a lack of leadership experience and developmental assignments as from unacceptable personal conduct. These problems have resulted, in some cases, in reliefs for cause and other sanctions. These outcomes can be devastating to an organization and have significantly negative effects on the climate and workplace environment as a whole.

The problems manifested at these senior grades have a solution that is straightforward; provide key developmental (KD) leadership opportunities throughout the careers of our strongest performing AGR NCOs to prepare them for positions of significant responsibility. Implementing these solutions must occur long before these leaders reach senior levels.

Four primary factors underlie the problem: structure, leader development, investment, and culture. To realize the greatest return on investment, leverage all best available talent from the AGR NCO cohort – we need a renaissance in terms of how the AGR force is managed. The exploration of each of these factors will help answer the question of how we grow, mentor, and train battalion command sergeants major who will eventually serve as the talent pool to fill brigade level billets and above.

Army Regulation 135-18, The Active Guard and Reserve Program (29 September 2017), paragraph 1-6a states the following:

“The objective of the AGR Program is to provide selected officers, warrant officers, and enlisted Soldiers to administer; instruct; organize; recruit and train as needed to meet the full-time support and readiness requirements for ARNGUS, ARNG, and USAR projects, programs, and missions. This includes but is not limited to the maintenance of supplies, equipment, aircraft; and the performance of other coordinating functions as required on a daily basis in the execution of operational missions and readiness. This regulation provides for—

*a. A career program offering opportunities that encourages retention through promotion, professional development, and assignments or attachments to positions of increased responsibility; this includes but is not limited to command and principal staff assignments.”*

The AGR Program is clearly acknowledged in this regulatory guidance as a career program which includes the provision of developmental assignments including command. For our NCO Corps this translates to leadership opportunities. So, why are our leadership billets at such a premium? The following paragraphs will explore that question and provide solutions.

## **Structure**

There is full acknowledgement of the challenges that our force management professionals face when working within the constraints and restraints of Title 10 and other guiding documents. DoD Instruction 1205.18 (May 4, 2007) states:

“The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, under the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD(P&R)), shall:

5.2.3. Ensure that FTS [full-time support] personnel are provided career opportunities, applicable to the category of employment for promotion, career progression, retention, education, and professional development...”

There is a tremendous amount of subjectivity included in the guidance that drives the administration of the AGR program. DODI 1205.18 is 12-year-old guidance, some of which has already been overridden relative to dual status military technicians. For the 11,579 noncommissioned officers serving in the AGR cohort, it is past time for a reevaluation of this document and the component can't wait. It is apparent that opportunities for leadership positions are not only feasible, they are simply a matter of commitment. Prioritizing leader development for all Soldiers, including AGR NCOs, will contribute significantly to the improvement of the program and the U.S. Army Reserve and most important, its readiness.

The ATOMM model (Administer, Train, Others, Maintain/Maintenance and Medical), an analytical approach developed within the U.S. Army Reserve Command (USARC), was validated in December 2011. The analysis was conducted, and its results were implemented in 2015. The purpose was to quantify the contribution of the AGR force to the Army Reserve. As briefed by then, Maj. Gen. Luis Visot, USARC deputy commanding general – operations at the time, the analytical structure of the model could not quantify *leadership* within its algorithms. As a result, when the findings of the analysis were implemented, the AGR force lost nearly 85 percent of its existing leadership positions. This served to relegate most AGR NCOs essentially to careers as staff enablers and did not offer them the opportunities to experience the challenges and successes of leadership.

The solution is simple and quick: immediately disregard the ATOMM model and conduct an analysis of strength levels at grade from the period prior to when the model's results were implemented. Currently the rate of AGR Soldiers against the overall USAR population is estimated at 8 percent and AGR first sergeant billets is at 1.7 percent. The portability of authorizations through the use of temporary manning authorities (TMAs) to provide leaders for

hard to fill billets would serve the dual purpose of providing leadership to the unit as well as development for AGR Soldiers to serve as platoon sergeants, first sergeants, command sergeants major and commanders.

These measures will be the start to providing a nominally commensurate number of billets to the AGR force and to build and expand the pool of candidates for more senior positions such as battalion and brigade CSM, noncommissioned officer academy commandants, and senior commanders. We must open the aperture in order to fill these most critical positions with the best qualified and most talented leaders.

Another high payoff opportunity is to adjust to the advent of command selection list. In the 2009 timeframe when it was implemented, the AGR Program did not adjust to the change to battalion and brigade CSM selections. Previously, when a SGM was selected to CSM his or her primary MOS changed to 00Z. Following the CSL implementation, battalion and brigade CSMs retained their primary MOS, causing MOSs at the E-9 level to become severely over strength. This caused many talented senior AGR NCOs who still had much to give to be involuntarily separated under qualitative service program provisions.

An area that cannot escape scrutiny is the “fair share” policy applied to the manning of 00G (MOS immaterial) coded positions. This generally affords availability of MOS non-specific billets to MOSs within the AGR program commensurate to the rate at which they exist relative to other MOSs. This is neither a policy, nor is it fair. It is the antithesis of the true practice of talent management and should be discarded with alacrity right along with the ATOMM model.

## **Culture**

Before we can understand the factors which most immediately impact the amount and quality of talent available for selection to the E-9 grade, we must understand the culture, or sub-culture within the Army Reserve that affects the AGR cohort.

It is imperative that we take a holistic approach to our Compo 3 force, made up of the TPU, AGR, and dual-status Civilians and in fact deemphasize duty status differences in the interest of building the team. This has been an issue for at least the last several years and is the result of mindsets that are allowed to prevail unchecked.

Some unit leadership teams don’t place the same sense of ownership on the AGR Soldiers as they might with their TPU Soldiers and the AGR Soldiers don’t get the mentorship and development needed. The leadership provided to these Soldiers is essential at the pivotal time of accession.

New AGR accessions generally have little understanding of their roles. Since the AGR Entrance Training (AGRET) was discontinued in 2005 (this will be discussed in further detail later), AGR Soldiers have been left to attempt to assimilate at their first units of assignment. The quality of these experiences varies widely and depends upon the commitment to sponsorship in each unit and the background of the new AGR accession in terms of job experience and/or prior active

duty experience. Some look at accession into the AGR Program as simply gaining a job rather than entering into a profession, which can be problematic. The motivation to enter the AGR program is less important than the performance of the Soldier. The quality of leadership provided to these Soldiers is absolutely essential at the time of accession and for their future development.

The contribution to the overall problem provided by this fractured culture seems to have a simple solution; educate the greater USAR unit level and senior leadership to understand that AGR Soldiers are their Soldiers every bit as much as their TPU Soldiers. We must help foster an appreciation for the fact that these Soldiers have made a commitment to the USAR that includes uprooting their families every two to four years to relocate and reestablish themselves. AGR Soldiers typically have no extended family or support system available to them and must rely in large measure on each other, which is a facet of the lifestyle that resembles life in the active Army. Active Army life, however, provides much more robust support in terms of sheer numbers of peers and other resources available on active Army installations.

Once we commit to making a deliberate effort to understand the mutual challenges in each other's complex lives we can then deemphasize duty status in the interest of fostering cohesive units that directly and positively impact readiness. The challenges that our TPU population endures is universally accepted and appreciated. There need not be a competition in terms of whose challenges are greater. Acceptance of the fact that mutual challenges exist ought to be sufficient to achieve cohesion in the team.

### **Leader Development**

Field Manual 6-22, Leader Development (30 June 2015) states that the principles of Army leadership and development are relevant across all Army components. It does not distinguish between the myriad duty statuses that exist. While cohorts are identified such as NCO, officer, and Army civilian it implies that leader development is the expectation for all Soldiers regardless of duty status. The NCO 2020 Strategy (4 December 2015) also outlines the tremendous amount of investment into the development of our NCO Corps. Indeed "Development" is one of the three lines of effort of the strategy of which FM 6-22 is driving doctrine.

We have an obligation to provide the best and most competent available leadership to our Soldiers in the Army Reserve. We are not seeking gratuitous opportunities for AGR Soldiers to fulfill leadership positions. In many cases leadership positions cannot be filled by the requisite rank and thus are filled by Soldiers much more junior than the position requires. This is a disservice to the unit and frankly the Soldier filling the position.

The solution to this matter is to provide a commensurate percentage of leadership positions to the AGR force relative to the greater component. Right now, AGR first sergeant positions account for 1.7 percent of all first sergeant positions across the Army Reserve. By contrast the

percentage of AGR Soldiers relative to the total USAR force is 8 percent. In March 2018 during an 83rd U.S. Army Reserve Readiness Training Center town hall discussion, Lieutenant General Luckey articulated the notion, in response to a question, that leadership opportunities commensurate with ratio of AGR to TPU strength would be a reasonable approach.

## **Investment**

As already referenced, FM 6-22 and the NCO 2020 Strategy provide unambiguous guidance on the investment that is expected to be dedicated to the development and fostering of our NCO Corps. A tremendous opportunity to make a significant investment with a guaranteed return is to resurrect the AGRET Program. At the behest of Command Sergeant Major Copeland, an active staff analysis is currently being conducted by the 83<sup>rd</sup> USARRTC in coordination with Mr. Xavier Coefield, chief, Active Military Management Branch, USARC G-1, with the assistance of the HRC's AGR program manager, Mr. Frank Kreeger.

As envisioned, the new incarnation will provide AGR accessions with vital information on training and will cover other topics invaluable to transitioning onto active duty. Younger, more junior Soldiers experience a significant learning curve during this time. Mentorship and sponsorship is inconsistent as it depends on the knowledge and ability of the full-time support personnel.

Like all Soldiers, AGR Soldiers must receive the highest quality mentorship, development, and sponsorship. This includes basic career guidance which prevents the loss of promotion opportunity, knowledge of benefits and entitlements relative to caring for families, and potential misunderstandings related to retirement eligibility. It is highly gratifying to report that as the result of a USARC tasker published in June, the AGRET program will resume in March 2020.

With the full implementation of IPPS-A on the horizon, a migration path for data relative to AGR Soldiers will be available and the sponsorship module in Army Career Tracker can be activated. This should be a priority as most veteran AGR Soldiers report having received either little to none, or poor sponsorship. This is especially troubling given that a significant percentage of AGR positions are located away from active military installations and the array of resources available.

The Army Reserve Personnel Advisor (ARPA) Program, an additional duty assigned to one or two individuals in each cohort (enlisted/WO/officer), has tremendous value but must be executed to its potential to realize its benefits. Currently there is little training or guidance issued for assigned ARPAs. The engagement of ARPAs with their AGR Soldiers and HRC career managers varies widely from highly engaged to a total lack of interaction. Investment in the ARPA Program would yield immediate dividends and would require that all stakeholders reach mutual understanding and synergy.

## Summary

Our Army Reserve has proven repeatedly that it can accomplish whatever it focuses its attention on. Breaking down the cultural barriers among the different duty statuses to achieve a state of greater mutual respect and understanding of each other's challenges must be one of those focus areas. There is no debate that the best possible leadership must be provided to Soldiers. Limiting leadership opportunities based on duty status makes little sense. The same limitations limit the development of an entire cohort and deprives units and Soldiers of the best possible leadership. The AGR force must be afforded a reasonable amount of opportunities to lead and excel the same as all other cohorts of the Army.

Field Manual 6-22 and The NCO 2020 Strategy outline the extraordinary investment that our Army expects us to dedicate to the development of our NCO Corps. Our structure as guided by Title 10 has limitations and this is acknowledged. To place further limitations on ourselves works to the detriment of our component, leader development, our Soldiers and units. By focusing to these areas and initiating the renaissance, the best available talent will provide the crucial leadership which will serve to elevate the performance of America's Army Reserve and have the greatest, most positive impact on readiness.

Sgt. Maj. [Edward Roderiques](#) completed his tenure as command sergeant major of the 83rd U.S. Army Reserve Readiness Training Center August 16, 2019. The 83rd USARRTC is the only all-active USAR brigade, staffed with 300 Active Guard and Reserve soldiers. Sergeant Major Roderiques has served since 1983 in various duty statuses, including assignment as deputy commandant, U.S. Army Drill Sergeant Academy. A member of the Reserve Organization of America, he continues to serve our nation and his soldiers.

ROA welcomes member contributions; please send submissions to ROA's executive director, Jeffrey Phillips, [jphillips@roa.org](mailto:jphillips@roa.org).