

# Writing Contest

## Army Management Staff College Sustaining Base Leadership and Management Program

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Seminar 13  
Student Number 992043

### Can Battles Be Won Under the Compressed Work Schedule?

I CERTIFY THAT THE FOLLOWING IS ENTIRELY MY OWN WORK EXCEPT AS  
REFERENCED.

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## ABSTRACT

Readiness is not the sole responsibility of the military. This paper examines the potential impact of the Compressed Work Schedule (CWS) on the performance of the Sustaining Base. Four major areas are examined: the general intent of the CWS; the Office of Personnel Management's report of the pros and cons; a specific dilemma within the Northeast Civilian Personnel Operations Center regarding CWS; and the possible impact upon the Department of the Army.

## Prologue

### For Want of a Nail

For want of a nail the shoe was lost,  
For want of a shoe the horse was lost,  
For want of a horse the rider was lost,  
For want of a rider the battle was lost,  
For want of a battle the kingdom was lost,  
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

Old English nursery rhyme

## **Can Battles Be Won Under the Compressed Work Schedule?**

Relentlessly the battle rages on under the scorching rays of the midday sun. There is no shade. There is no breeze. There is only adrenaline. The M-1 tanks rumble across the field. There is a burst of intense fire followed by blinding smoke and more gunfire. Finally, stillness settles in and unintelligible sounds hang in the air. Some soldiers are exhausted on the ground; others sit with vacant expressions. They are all tired, hungry, and homesick. But they are not without high morale, because they know that tomorrow is their RDO, or regular day off under the Compressed Work Schedule. *A fixed day off during a battle?* Think again!

Americans would never envision allowing soldiers in battle a fixed day off. Yet we expect much less of the civilians who provide them support. We must face the fact that the Compressed Work Schedule (CWS) may be undermining the effectiveness of the Sustaining Base when it comes to supporting our soldiers.

Readiness is not the sole responsibility of the military. It is shared with the civilians in the Sustaining Base. This joint effort takes the commitment of all Department of Army employees. This paper will first examine the general intent of CWS and the situations it covers. We will then look at the pros and cons of implementing this optional work schedule and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) survey that supports those findings. Next, this paper will delineate the dilemma facing the Northeast Civilian Personnel Operations Center (NECPOC), located at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. Finally, an extrapolation will be made on the possible overall impact on the Department of the Army.

**General Intent of the Compressed Work Schedule:** The Federal Government has been examining various ways to improve the productivity and morale of the workforce through the implementation of "family-friendly" initiatives. One such endeavor falls under the Federal Employees Flexible and Compressed Work Schedules Act of 1982 in 5 United States Code & section 6120.<sup>1</sup> President William J. Clinton, as evidenced by two separate memorandums dated July 11, 1994<sup>2</sup> and June 21, 1996<sup>3</sup> supports this Act. Both memorandums prompt agencies to encourage the expanded implementation of flexible work arrangements, but his 1996 directive also includes a statement that addresses the need for employee commitment and productivity.

This Act covers two work schedule alternatives. One is the flexible work schedule. About 92 percent of Federal employees participate in this program.<sup>4</sup> This option allows employees the opportunity to set their arrival and departure times, within agreed upon limits.<sup>5</sup> The other alternative under this act is the compressed work schedule. The latter is the primary focus of this paper.

There are several models of fixed tours of duty under the compressed work schedules, but the most popular are the four-day workweek, the three-day workweek, and the 5/4-9 compressed plan. These alternatives purportedly provide employees with flexibility in meeting their own personal needs. The four-day workweek basically permits an employee to work four 10-hour days each week. In return, the employee would have a three-day weekend every week. The three-day workweek has an employee working 13 hours and 20 minutes each day and provides the employee with four days off every week. The 5/4-9 compressed plan allows an employee to work eight 9-hour days and one 8-hour day in a biweekly pay period. Thus, the employee alternates between a three-day weekend and a regular two-day weekend.<sup>6</sup>

**Pros and Cons of Implementing a Compressed Work Schedule:** The Office of Personnel Management conducted a survey in 1998, which tried to capture the effectiveness of the family-friendly programs. They listed a number of pros and cons with the mean score for the benefits almost double (to the positive side) to that of the cons.<sup>7</sup>

On the pro side they listed that family friendly programs helped employees balance work and personal needs, improved employee moral, reduced unscheduled absences, improved performance, and enhanced recruiting. It went on to report that the implementation of the programs improved customer service, reduced sick leave usage, reduced turnover and overtime, and reduced requirements for office space and equipment.<sup>8</sup>

On the con side of the report it showed that these programs made it difficult to schedule meetings, led to inadequate office coverage, caused problems between managers and employees, increased sick leave usage, and increased equipment and/or facilities costs. Furthermore, it led to employee abuse of workplace flexibility, caused problems between employees, increased customer complaints and decreased performance.<sup>9</sup> Some of the findings actually appear to nullify each other.

Although this information provides a good broad brush of the overall effectiveness of the various programs, the helpfulness of the data is fairly limited when it comes to specifics. First, all the family-friendly programs were lumped together in the tabulation of these results. This report covers ten separate programs which range from fare subsidies to telecommuting to on-site and near-site childcare centers to CWS.<sup>10</sup> Based on the information presented there is no way to discern the specific impact of any program, including the CWS option.

Another concern with this report is that there is no information provided regarding the number of surveys that were returned. Likewise, there is no mention of the relative percentage to

the number of surveys issued and those that were returned. Was it one percent of twenty thousand surveys issued? Was it twenty percent of a thousand mailed? This information would be helpful in determining the relevance and applicability of the report.

Another area of concern with this report is that the respondents to this survey represent over sixty-one government agencies, with Department of Defense being just one of them.<sup>11</sup> There is no breakdown that targets the impact on Department of Defense, much less the Department of Army. Why is this information so important? Because different agencies have different missions and some missions do not lend themselves as readily to compressed work schedules. One such organization is the Northeast Civilian Personnel Operations Center.

**The Northeast Civilian Personnel Operations Center Dilemma:** There is a dilemma at Aberdeen Proving Ground. Over two years ago most of the installation bought into a compressed work schedule for their workforce. One of the exceptions was the Northeast Civilian Personnel Operations Center (NECPOC).<sup>12</sup>

While many installation employees spend one day out of every ten “regular” workdays with their families, sleeping in late, not commuting to work, shopping or otherwise investing their time as they please others can be found at work. Some of those individuals work for the NECPOC located in the Ryan Building. The cost of keeping this building open is \$765 per day for utilities.<sup>13</sup> Even though the cost of staying open is minimal, this arrangement has caused morale to plummet for some want-to-have CWS employees and some personnel who are on the CWS. It has even caused hard feelings for some groups of individuals who were directed to go on CWS and did not want to do it. Some of these attitudes are not surprising considering that even the post commander and his military and civilian staff have alternate Fridays off.<sup>14</sup> But what is right for the NECPOC? Perhaps some additional facts would help.

The Assistant Secretary of the Army, Manpower and Reserve Affairs, tasked the NECPOC to provide personnel services to over 40,000 people located at twenty-one installations in eight states. This office also provides services to satellite employees in 28 additional states, one commonwealth, one U.S. possession and eleven countries.<sup>15</sup> This collection of customers includes arsenals, chemical and nuclear surety activities, six Corps of Engineer Districts, depots, environmental agencies, medical agencies and commands, research and development agencies, top ranked education activities, weapons testing agencies, troop support and training support.<sup>16</sup> Among all of the twenty-one Civilian Personnel Advisory Centers (CPACS), only one is on the compressed work schedule – the one located on APG.<sup>17</sup>

Almost all of the NECPOC customers serve in direct support of the combat soldier, and in order for them to support the soldier they must in turn be supported. This charge comes from a succession of vision statements as cited:

***The U.S. Army Vision:*** *The world's best army, a full spectrum force trained and ready for victory. A total force of quality soldiers and civilians:*

- \* A values-based organization
- \* An integral part of the *joint team*
- \* Equipped with the most modern weapons and equipment the country can provide
- \* Able to respond to our Nation's needs
- \* Changing to meet challenges of today, tomorrow, and the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>18</sup>

***The Assistant Secretary of the Army, Manpower and Reserve Affairs Vision:*** *Army Civilian Personnel Professionals helping leaders meet the mission.*<sup>19</sup>

***The Northeast Civilian Personnel Operations Center Vision:*** *An Army team working in partnership to provide timely, accurate and personal human resource service in support of the customer's mission.*<sup>20</sup>

If we take the position, as stated in the above vision statements, that Americans need and want a trained and ready Army and that the role of personnel is to help leaders meet that mission, then management and employee actions must back that up. To fulfill that vision it takes the

entire Army team, not a civilian team or a military team, but “a” team. Partnerships must be formed within the Army family that work together to recruit personnel, support them, and right-size the force. These actions must be done in a timely, accurate, personal and accountable fashion. This must be done to keep our soldiers in a state of readiness and to ensure that personnel agencies are competitive in providing that support.

Private industry also recognizes the need for adherence to mission. Rice University supports compressed work schedules when "...it will achieve, maintain, or enhance excellent service and performance." As a secondary issue, they also hope that these schedules will "...improve employee morale and assist the University in meeting requirements for employee trip reduction in compliance with the Clean Air Act.<sup>21</sup> Are Rice University officials interested in their employees? It certainly appears so, but they also recognize the importance of the mission.

Another example of an organization using the compressed work schedule comes from the medical community. The National Institute of Health, Clinical Center Nursing Department located in Bethesda, Maryland supports the use of the alternate work schedule, but clearly states up front that its use will be continually monitored. The reason for this is that they want to ensure that safe patient care and research support are achieved.<sup>22</sup> The mission must be met.

**Possible Impact on the Department of the Army:** For want of a nail...the war was lost.<sup>23</sup> In How the Army Runs General George Marshall is recognized for his understanding that in complex organizations every action or problem will impact upon every function of the organization.<sup>24</sup> The decision facing the NECPOC does not just impact that organization or just its immediate customers. The decision whether or not to close the office an extra day of the week would set off a chain reaction that could ultimately affects our soldiers. There are four major reasons why the NECPOC, and DA as a whole, should approach CWS very cautiously.

The first reason for judicial use of CWS is that we must ensure that this program is accomplishing what it was set out to do. Current available data, as provided by OPM, is not adequate. Is the employee morale and welfare really being improved, while at the same time retaining the very important factor of productivity? Right now there are individuals at APG that are on the CWS program that do not want to be. Their reasons generally fall into a few select categories: child care, adult care, outside formal education and other extracurricular activities. If these members of the Sustaining Base are unhappy about the schedule forced upon them it could very easily impact their productivity, which in turn impacts their immediate customers and then ripples forward to the soldier and DA as a whole.

The second reason that the use of this program should be approached cautiously is the fatigue factor that was mentioned earlier. Can employees who are on this work schedule maintain high productivity for indefinite periods of time working 9, 10 or 13 plus hours a day? Even those employees who want to be on CWS may not have the physical and mental endurance to maintain productivity standards under prolonged workdays. To date no studies have been published from APG regarding individual productivity. If these members of the Sustaining Base are unable to maintain their levels of performance it could also very easily impact their productivity, which in turn impacts their immediate customers and then ripples forward to the soldier and DA as a whole.

The third reason for concern is that this program may actually be absorbing more money in overtime than it is saving. One of the reasons some management officials decided to support CWS was because of their belief that this type of schedule would reduce overtime. Initially that appeared to be the case, but time has not really proven that out. As an example, the implementation of CWS has not positively impacted the Aberdeen Test Center (ATC) at APG in

the long run. The ATC is world renowned for its live fire testing and rough and rugged obstacle courses for military vehicles. Originally, they implemented CWS with the intent of the extending the workday to take advantage of the daylight hours during the summer for outside testing purposes. It was envisioned that this would reduce the overtime that was being used to set up for tests. Initially the schedule seemed to decrease the amount of overtime used, but now (after almost two years) the organization has not reduced its use of overtime.<sup>25</sup> Use of overtime drives up overall cost and results in less money being available in other areas of need within DA.

The fourth reason is the most important issue of all. What do our customers need and want? Organizations are not isolated islands. Their actions affect the missions of other organizations. Many tenant organizations at APG provide services to other customers off post who are not on the CWS. That means, for example, that one day out of every ten working days, those customers are unable to communicate with their points of contact who work at APG. Sure APG employees may be available during a longer period over the other nine days, but what good is that if the customers do not need them during that extra time? When you start multiplying the potential down time for conducting business throughout DA the concern is staggering.

Potentially there are thousands of DA customers who are not having their needs met or even listened to one day out of ten. Before implementing the CWS we need to listen to our customers first and find out what hours of operation best suite them; not dictate to them when we will be available. This step is critical if we truly want to provide customer service.

As part of the Sustaining Base, I know that we play a part in the success of the Army. Our soldiers are relying on those individuals that we hire to help them Shape, Respond and Prepare Now for the uncertainties that lie ahead for this country.<sup>26</sup> Working a five-day workweek is a small sacrifice to support our soldiers who are ready to sacrifice it all.

**Conclusion:** Organizations have a responsibility to ensure that family friendly initiatives do not overshadow the mission. Certainly, we should be interested and proactive in the morale and welfare of our employees, but a proper perspective must be maintained. It needs to be remembered that CWS is a management tool, not an employee entitlement. As such, it should only be implemented when it serves the needs of not only the employee, but also and very importantly the soldier.

Before the leaders within the Department of the Army feel compelled and/or pressured to implement CWS two things should happen. First the Office of Personnel Management should reexamine their report and how it was compiled. There should be a report for defense agencies and the specific impact of CWS. This would provide more meaningful information on the usefulness and appropriateness of this type of work schedule. If they do not take the lead then DA should conduct their own survey and evaluate their own findings.

Secondly, before any office implements this type of schedule they should closely examine the suitability of this program to their mission. In this regard, a very high priority should be communication with customers and an assessment of the customers' needs and desires.

It has been said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. As well intentioned as this program may be, the ultimate potential negative impact to the soldier outweighs individual desires for those of us who are committed to the Army's Sustaining Base.

## Epilogue

### For Want of a Day

For want of a day the worker was not hired,  
For want of a worker the project was not done,  
For want of the project the bridge was not built,  
For want of the bridge the soldiers could not advance,  
For want of advance the hill could not be taken,  
For want of the hill the battle was lost,  
And all for the want of a day.

Old English nursery rhyme  
revised by Debra Jennings,  
a personnelist

## ENDNOTES

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- 5 U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Labor-Management Relations Guidance Bulletin, Negotiating Flexible and Compressed Work Schedules. July 1995.
- 6 U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Handbook On Alternative Work Schedules, Appendix, C, Models of Compressed Work Schedules.
- 7 U.S. Office of Personnel Management, A Review of Federal Family-Friendly Workplace Arrangements: A Report to Congress. Office of Workforce Relations, Theodore Roosevelt Building, Washington, DC. August 1998, p. 18.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 U.S. Office of Personnel Management, A Review of Federal Family-Friendly Workplace Arrangements: A Report to Congress. Office of Workforce Relations, Theodore Roosevelt Building, Washington, DC. August 1998, p. 1.
- 11 U.S. Office of Personnel Management, A Review of Federal Family-Friendly Workplace Arrangements: A Report to Congress. Office of Workforce Relations, Theodore Roosevelt Building, Washington, DC. August 2998, Appendix c, pp. 39-40.
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- 14 U.S. Army, Aberdeen Proving Ground, TECOM Headquarters. Information provided telephonically, July 6, 1999. (PS via PA)
- 15 Northeast Region CPOC, CPAC Brochure, Providing Personnel Services Throughout the Northeastern United States – Bringing Home the Vision. (The information in this brochure was obtained though phone contacts with each of the twenty-one Civilian Personnel Advisory Centers in the Northeast Region, 1998.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 U.S. Army, Aberdeen Proving Ground, NECPOC, Office of the Director. Information obtained April 20, 1999. (DW)
- 18 U.S. Army Mission and Vision and Army Vision 2010. URL [http://www.army.ec.sra.com/knowledge/docs/doc116/mission\\_.htm](http://www.army.ec.sra.com/knowledge/docs/doc116/mission_.htm). Retrieved from the World Wide Web on July 3, 1999.
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- 22 National Institute of Health Clinical Center Nursing Department, Compressed Work Schedule (CWS) Policy. URL <http://ohrm.cc.nih.gov/>. Associate Director for Nursing, Kathryn Lothschuetz Montgomery, RN, MS, CNAA. Policy implemented April 1993.
- 23 Old English nursery rhyme.
- 24 How the Army Runs: A Senior Leader Reference Handbook, 1997-1998. Published by Department of the Army, United States Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, April 1, 1997, p. 2-1.
- 25 U.S. Army, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Aberdeen Test Center. Information obtained telephonically July 3, 1999. (DJ)

26 National Military Strategy of the United States of America: Shape, Respond, Prepare Now: A Military Strategy for a New Era. Washington, DC., September 1997.

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