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## STRATCOM Strong

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# BEEN THERE, DONE THAT STRATCOM STRONG

A program document you may never hear about

*(First in a series of quarterly commentaries by former program managers from the Naval Postgraduate School)*

*by Dr. Robert F. Mortlock, COL, USA (Ret.)*

*Most of the time when people say, “Been there, done that,” they probably haven’t. To say that the former program managers who will be writing this new series of insightful columns have been there and done that is not a boast but an understatement. We at Army AL&T magazine marveled at our good fortune when the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS)—specifically Senior Lecturer John T. Dillard, COL, USA (Ret.), academic area chairman for systems acquisition management and himself a former program manager at multiple levels—approached us with the idea of a series of lessons-learned articles by former O-6 project managers who teach at NPS.*

*This is the series’ inaugural article, food for both thought and action. We intend this series not to be quarterly statements of fact, but quarterly conversation starters. Yes, these folks have been there and done that—but maybe you have, too. We hope you will feel free to raise your hand and jump right into the conversation. Please send us your feedback to continue the discussion.*

**T**he program is on schedule, under budget and meeting performance requirements—but terminated anyway! Government PMs—product, project and program managers alike—are responsible for cost, schedule and performance of assigned programs. Well, sort of. Many external factors affecting programs are outside their control.

These PMs operate in the center of a volatile, complex, uncertain and ambiguous system called “Big ‘A’ Defense Acquisition”—trying to navigate the requirements process (Joint Capabilities and Integration Development System, the Planning, Programming, Budgeting and Execution system, and the DOD Acquisition 5000 series). If that weren’t enough, PMs get guidance from key stakeholders, such as senior service leaders and members of Congress, as well as scrutiny from the media. In the end, having a program on schedule, under budget and meeting requirements may not be enough to deliver capability to the warfighter.

What’s missing? For one thing, a strategic communications (STRATCOM) plan, which has proved to be invaluable to program success.

**OPTIONAL BUT ADVISABLE**

You will not find “STRATCOM plan” listed as a required document at any program milestone review. Nor do I propose that it be; too many unnecessary milestone review documents are required already (a separate topic). However, a STRATCOM plan can serve a PM very well if approved by the service chain of command and used effectively. It can be a synchronization tool for the entire Army staff, serving as an operations order (OPORD) for program implementation across the Army.

A STRATCOM plan is particularly useful for programs that affect all service members (representing a high level of interest), have complex and multiple milestone decision authorities, and/or have high visibility with Congress and the media and a correspondingly high level of interest with service senior leaders. Two programs that fit this description are the Army’s physical fitness uniform and the camouflage effort for Army uniforms and equipment.

In early 2012, the Army decided to upgrade its Soldier fitness uniform from the Improved Physical Fitness Uniform (IPFU) to the Army Physical Fitness Uniform (APFU). Soldiers were dissatisfied with the IPFU, which had been

in use since the mid-1990s. The APFU program used extensive Soldier feedback (both surveys and testing) to improve the fitness uniform and implement the program in a cost-conscious way.

For combat uniforms and equipment, the Army decided to adopt the operational camouflage pattern, which would provide Soldiers effective concealment during combat operations and prove to be a force protection combat multiplier across the modern battlefield.

Both the APFU and the camouflage programs needed a synchronization tool, as their implementation was highly visible among Soldiers, senior leaders, Congress and the media at a time of sequestration and intense budget uncertainty. The last thing the Army wanted to do was make a uniform change not necessitated by Soldier feedback, not operationally relevant, contrary to pending legislation or congressional intent, or with the potential to create a black eye in the media for the Army.

Additionally, the camouflage effort crossed multiple chains of command because it affected both uniforms and equipment having no single milestone decision authority (MDA). Uniform changes are approved by the chief of staff of the Army (CSA)—and sometimes the secretary of the Army (SecArmy), if there is intense congressional, public or media interest—after an approval recommendation from the Army Uniform Board. But camouflage also goes on organizational clothing and individual equipment, and each piece of Soldier kit (cold weather clothing, rucksacks, weapons, bags for night vision sights, etc.) may have a different program MDA—either a program executive officer (PEO) or the Army acquisition executive (AAE), depending on the acquisition category.



**Operational Camouflage Pattern Army Combat Uniform (ACU)**

- Soldiers are authorized to wear the Operational Camouflage Pattern ACU starting 1 July 2015. Sales will begin July 2015. Centralized issue for incoming Soldiers will begin January 2016 (2QFY16). Mandatory possession date is 1 October 2019.
- Soldiers are authorized to wear the sand or the Tan 499 T-shirt, sand or Tan 499 belt, and tan or Coyote Brown boots during the transition period which ends 30 SEP 2019.
- Tan 499 T-shirt color: Available starting July 2015.
- Tan 499 belt color: Available starting July 2015.
- Coyote Brown boot color: Available starting August 2015.



**NOTE: Soldiers may only wear OEF-CP headgear with the OEF-CP Flame Resistant Army Combat Uniform and Operational Camouflage Pattern headgear with the Operational Camouflage Pattern Army Combat Uniform.**

**HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT**

The operational camouflage pattern became available for purchase in select military clothing sales stores July 1, 2015. While camouflage goes on a wide variety of organizational clothing and individual equipment, each piece of which may have a different program MDA, there is no MDA for the pattern itself. As a result, many groups of people across multiple chains of command have a stake in the camouflage pattern, making a STRATCOM plan all the more advisable to help gain their buy-in. (Image courtesy of PEO Soldier)



### THE OLD AND THE NEW

Black socks are now authorized for wear with both the traditional gray IPFU and the new (black and gold) APFU, worn here by a U.S. Army Alaska formation participating in an Army Birthday Run in June 2015 on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. The APFU resulted from Soldier feedback. A good STRATCOM plan kept stakeholders on target and helped to prevent requirements creep. (Photo by Alejandro Pena, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson Public Affairs)

### A FIXED REFERENCE POINT

Recognizing the need for a document to help synchronize the APFU and camouflage implementation efforts, the program management office wrote a STRATCOM plan for each effort in early 2013. Although coordinating review and approval of these documents through the Army staff was painful, it ultimately paid big dividends as the programs were questioned by Soldiers, senior leaders, Congress and the media.

The STRATCOM plans that we used had the following sections: intent, background, environment, risks, target audience (primary and secondary), vulnerabilities and mitigation, execution, public affairs guidance, points of contact and enclosures (top-level messages, talking points, questions and answers, execution matrix, program support overview and information slides). This may seem like an overwhelmingly long document, but it certainly does not have to be. The base document we used was four pages long and the enclosures were another 10 pages. The program overview consisted of only seven slides describing the program.

Each document was signed and approved by the key stakeholders from the user community, the Army staff through the CSA, the acquisition chain of authority through the AAE, and the SecArmy.

Many times, senior leaders tried to “help” the efforts by adding requirements, commenting on efforts or changing the implementation strategies. Each time, I, as the PM, referenced and shared the STRATCOM plan approved by the CSA and SecArmy. The plan proved tremendously useful to avoid requirements creep, budget cuts and schedule delays. Additionally, the STRATCOM plan was the only program document I had that contained a written “commander’s intent” clearly outlining the program vision and boundaries for me as a PM.

PMs can tailor a STRATCOM plan to their particular effort and use it as a “living” document to be updated when program “fact of life” changes necessitate it.

### CONCLUSION

I know: another document to write and staff ... more oversight ... less empowerment for the PM ... more coordination. I understand and empathize. The beauty here is that a STRATCOM plan is not required by statute or regulation. However, I highly recommend one for any program that has high visibility with Soldiers, senior leaders, Congress or the media, or any program that crosses MDA boundaries.

You never know what external factors can derail programs, even those on schedule, within budget and meeting requirements. And right now, there is no program document that tells the program’s story—that synchronizes the program’s implementation and execution plan across the service and provides the commander’s intent succinctly—to serve as the program execution OPOD. The objective of the defense acquisition system is to get a capability in the hands of warfighters, and a STRATCOM plan can help a PM and the service do that more effectively.

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