

Defense Acquisition Executive Overview Workshop

When You Need to Know Now!

GREG CARUTH

Program Manager: Your course is relatively new and not widely advertised. We hope to change that. Why would a person take the Defense Acquisition Executive Overview Workshop (DAEOW) versus any other courses at DSMC? What is different about yours? What is the subject? And more importantly, what is the value?

Burnes: There are a couple of differences. The course ranges from a half day to two days. It's aimed at the general officer/flag level or SES for civilians.

And it's tailored. When participants call and ask for this course, we sit down together and develop a curriculum. Usually they want the course on their way to a new assignment. Believe it or not, people do go to new assignments at the O7 level in acquisition. If it's their first time in acquisition, they say "Tell me everything I need to know about acquisition in two days." We try to do that. Most requests for the course are requested through the Commandant for obvious reasons.

Program Manager: This is a high-level course. Two days isn't much time.

Greg Caruth, Director, DSMC Visual Arts and Press, interviewed Dr. Bob Burnes, Defense Acquisition Executive Overview Workshop (DAEOW) Course Director, on behalf of the DSMC Press. Throughout the interview, Burnes highlights the course content; talks about student eligibility; discusses course progress, past and present; and encourages potential students to attend this unusual and innovative course offering.

"...the course was arranged and tailored specifically for me and my Deputy, and I truly appreciate the cooperative effort and spirit of your faculty and staff...DSMC is an outstanding resource and repository of knowledge..."

—Navy Rear Adm.

"...a superb job pulling together all the various aspects of contracting...gave me a great insight to the entire contracting process and pitfalls to avoid."

—Army Brig. Gen.

Burnes: The course is not scheduled. It's given strictly on demand, and it's intensive.

Program Manager: How many people are at each offering?

Burnes: It varies. We piloted this course in March 1995 for a political appointee. We were told that he was coming with three or four of his lieutenants. When they arrived, the class had grown to 25 or 30 of his staff. Fortunately, that has never happened again. In the other six classes we've held since then, we have had as few as one person and as many as five.

Program Manager: How do you generate additional students for a course if you know you're going to offer one, or do you try to do that?

Burnes: No. We don't.

Program Manager: So it's usually a group of people from the same office or the same area?

Burnes: Not necessarily. Sometimes that happens. Recently in June, for example, we had two brigadiers, com-



DSMC PROFESSOR AL BECK CONDUCTS A SESSION OF THE DAEOW. FROM LEFT: BECK; NAVY REAR ADM. STEVEN BAKER, COMMANDER, OPTEVFOR; NAVY CAPT. VANCE TOALSON, CHIEF OF STAFF AND DEPUTY COMMANDER, OPTEVFOR.



DSMC PROFESSOR DR. BOB BURNES CONDUCTS A RECENT SESSION OF THE DEFENSE ACQUISITION EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW WORKSHOP. FROM LEFT: BURNES; MARINE COL. SLADE BREWER, COMMANDER MCOTEA; MARINE COL. R. E. WHITE, MARCORSYSCOM.

mand level; both happened to be Army. But they were from different installations, doing different jobs. But both expressed an interest in contracting. They wanted a two-day version. The first day was general acquisition. The second day was contracting. So we tailored the course to meet their needs. Since they had “like interests,” we brought them in together. They didn’t even know each other, which is unusual.

On the other hand, we had a Navy commander attend with his chief of staff. That’s more typical.

It’s exciting, from our point of view, that we never know what’s next in terms of when the class will be, how many people will be in it, who they’ll be, or what they’ll want to know. We’ve had O-7 to O-9 (promotables) in class. And it’s been well received. Up until the 1997 DSMC Catalog, the course has never been advertised. Business has come strictly through word-of-mouth.

Program Manager: *So somebody could call you and—as one person, or as several people from a group—ask you to teach practically anything in program management that they wanted to know? And you tailor it for them?*

Burnes: Yes, anything in acquisition! Usually I work with their point of contact, develop a curriculum, send it to them; they mark it up, send it back, and finalize the date; then I schedule faculty experts to present the class.

Program Manager: *So this is basically education, but in many ways it’s really one-on-one consulting.*

Burnes: Yes. Because it’s so tailored, you could call it consulting. You could call it continuing education. It’s quite possible people could come back several times. In other words, if they go into an assignment in contracting, and don’t know enough about contracting, they attend—then the next assignment is logistics, and if they don’t know enough about logistics, they come

back. This is not necessarily a one-time shot.

We teach this course only on the main Fort Belvoir campus. For each specialty area, we get an expert—or several—from the faculty to tailor the subject.

We have gone to the Pentagon on one occasion. But, ideally, we’d like to have it at our main campus because, obviously, if we’re going to run multiple professors in and out of a room, it’s much easier to do that if we hold it here.

Program Manager: *Who initiated this concept?*

Burnes: I first heard about it in January 1995 in the former DSMC Executive and Short Courses Division under Air Force Colonel Andy Zaleski. Somehow, and I don’t know how, the word came down to him through the Commandant’s Office that there was a political appointee who wanted training in defense acquisition. To his credit, either he or somebody who worked with him said, “You need to go somewhere and find out about this thing called ‘defense acquisition.’” So he called us.

We put on a special one-time-only short course, two days—everything he needed to know about acquisition. Zaleski put it together and delivered it with his staff and other members of the faculty.

Then starting September 1995, six months later, folks started calling and coming. The Army, Navy, and Marines have shown great interest in all this.

So far, with only one exception, we’ve been able to address all the information using our own faculty. We’ve had the right expertise, and it was available at the right time. On one occasion, we brought in an expert from OSD. So that’s another pool of expertise; we do that in our executive courses too.

When we start out, some don’t know enough about acquisition to ask the

right questions—to say, “I need to know about...” I fax them a quick survey covering all the acquisition areas. That’s our starting point.

Program Manager: *What throughput are you prepared to deliver if this process takes off? That would have to be a concern.*

Burnes: Yes it is—kind of a two-edged sword. We’d like to see it take off. On the other hand, with a combination of drawdowns which we’ve experienced, and the tight availability of classroom space, I’d like to face the challenge of answering all the demand. That would be a nice problem to have.

Program Manager: *Do you have any big sticks in the fire at this point?*

Burnes: We have two more people who’ve expressed an interest, and I’ve gotten the heads-up that they are Navy types. I’ve gotten a heads-up through my Dean, Captain Vernon, to stand by for these folks. That’s usually the way the process starts. Keep in mind, we are doing this aside from our regular, officially mandated workload.

Program Manager: *These seem like requests you can’t ignore.*

Burnes: Interesting you should mention that. These are requests that we cannot afford to turn down—no matter what the situation.

I’m excited about the possibility to do this and help more people, because not only do we help them out, but, as indicated by some written endorsements from previous participants, they send others who work for them to take this course. Most requests we get come through the Commandant’s Office for obvious reasons.

Program Manager: *What does it cost the requesting organization?*

Burnes: There’s no tuition involved. The only expense to the organization or participant is TDY expenses, if any.

Program Manager: *At what grade do you start? You mention general officer/flag level. You’re not doing any colonels?*

Burnes: We’ve done one colonel, who came with a rear admiral. Each was a commander. It was a general officer/SES-level brief. What we do, because of the small audience—with the exception of the very first one—we do as a desktop, hard-copy interchange, rather than as a formal, stand-up slide show. Very informal. As an example of the flexibility and the extent to which we can go, the one O9 (promotable) who came in received the two-day agenda as a starting point. He came back and said it looked good except to “Remove all the breaks; take out the lunch hours!” We started at 8:00 in the morning and went until 4:30 in the afternoon, and then started the next morning at 8:00 and were done by noon. It was the ultimate fire hose. There was no stopping.

Program Manager: *Have you had any reactions from people that you can quote?*

Burnes: Off the top of my head, the only quotable quote that comes to mind is, “This was right on target for me.” The tone of the “attaboy” letters that have come to me through the commandant have been in the same vein.

Program Manager: *Can you think of anything I didn’t ask that you want to add?*

Burnes: What I think we need to do is recap. Let people know that there’s something a little different down here, that’s specialized, that’s one-on-one, that will bring them up to speed quickly in areas where they are lacking—through no fault of their own—particularly if they’ve taken on responsibilities they have not had an opportunity to experience. It’s a fire hose of information, experiences, lessons learned. It’s something they can get quickly in a

few days from experts, so that they have some idea what they’re facing and where others have been before them; and if we don’t have them [experts], we’ll get them. There’s probably no place else they can get that.

Program Manager: *If you were to describe a potential student or group of students, where do they get their bang for the buck and where do you get yours?*

Burnes: Let me say that probably a one-on-one is cost-effective in terms of what it may save the government on a program—but it’s not the way we think about doing business. Probably three to five people, up to 12, is reasonable; 30 isn’t.

Program Manager: *If this is continuing education, who do they contact? You directly or the DSMC Registrar?*

Burnes: In the advertising we’re doing now, I request they contact me directly at (703) 805-4563, DSN 655-4563, Fax (703) 805-2215, or on the Internet at burnesb@dsmc.dsm.mil.

Program Manager: *Any last reflections?*

Burnes: I think, looking back over the ones we’ve done, which have indeed spanned the gamut from one to 30 people, I think the best interchange and learning occurs when the boss is there—that is, the general officer or commander—along with the chief of staff. We’ve had that in several situations, and we get two of them firing questions at us. That provides two perspectives because, obviously, the chief of staff has a different job than the commander.

Program Manager: *What they gain could mean substantial cost savings to the government.*

Burnes: Absolutely. At their level, mistakes could cost billions of dollars. That pays for a lot of two-day courses.