

# Winning the Last Battle: Inactivation

CPT Aubrey Ingalls

The impact and threat of future sequestration is real and would be felt at every level of the force. The resulting effect of the 2011 sequester was the inactivation of 13 brigade combat teams (BCTs) and three aviation brigades.

One of those BCTs — the 4-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) — inactivated upon return from its Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) 12-13 deployment. The inactivation concept required an unfamiliar approach, and the process proved to be incredibly painful. The two primary reasons the inactivation of our companies and battalions was so difficult were:

- 1) There was no step-by-step blueprint for closing shop, and
- 2) The company-level supply sergeants and executive officers (XOs) did not realize until late in the process just how much initiative they needed to exercise from the outset.

The purpose of this article is to provide a general framework on which to base a battalion's inactivation plans and to alert supply teams to possible pitfalls. The following lessons learned are from my perspective in the Raider Brigade as XO of Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Battalion. As the battalion's final property holder, I learned many of these lessons the hard way. If I were to inactivate another battalion, I would focus on the following:

## Fix PBUSE and Trim the Books

Unfortunately, Property Book Unit Supply Enhanced (PBUSE) doesn't automatically update component listings to match the latest technical manuals (TMs). In fact, PBUSE allows users to alter or modify the component listings for any given end item. Odds are that your listings of components do not match the latest TM for any given end item. Fix this problem first because it will have to be done eventually in order to execute any lateral transfers. Besides, gaining units will use the latest TMs, just like you would.

Changes in PBUSE, of course, require commanders to reinventory property to accurately reflect shortages. This is a good thing and the only way for commanders to prevent being left with the bill for years of bad record keeping. If it is not prescribed property, it needs to go. Chances are good that a past commander put some fancy flashlights on the books for accountability after the deployment. While accountability is always commendable, a transaction must occur to remove them from the books.

Have the property book officer (PBO) pull them off the books and use them to bribe another unit: "If you sign for this trailer, you can have these super-cool flashlights!" If the PBO will not take them off the books, they will be the last item you transfer because no one wants to add 60 flashlights to their property book, especially when half are broken and replacement bulbs.

Also, equipment that belongs together but has been split into two line item numbers (LINs) — particularly Advanced System Improvement Program (ASIP) radios and Enhanced Position Location and Reporting System (EPLRS) radios — needs to be re-assembled in PBUSE to complete lateral transfers. Raise this issue early as it will likely require significant time to resolve.

## Empty Everything in Your AO

Get into absolutely everything. Not just the closet on the third floor but also the mold-covered cardboard box underneath the wet mop heads in that very same closet. If it is not organizational or installation property, get it out and get it gone. Ideally, all excess in the battalion is consolidated and grouped by like item to make “shopping” easier. Put a portion of the S4 section in charge of the consolidated excess and let them know that the sooner it all goes away, the sooner they can leave the unit.

There are a few ways to get rid of the endless amount of junk your unit has collected over the decades. The best and most obvious way is to fill shortages. (Good thing you just updated your shortages according to the latest TMs.) Not only is it the responsible thing to do, but it helps the unit that will eventually sign for the equipment. The second way to get rid of excess is to let other units come “shopping.” The battalion’s consolidated excess can quickly be tallied on a document and sent all over the installation. Non-inactivating battalion XOs will jump at the chance to fill shortages for free.

The last, best way to get rid of excess is the Supply Support Activity (SSA). They may not like it and may eventually stop taking any excess. So, make sure your supply sergeant keeps them on good terms and is the first to tap into their goodwill before it runs out.

Keep in mind that Soldiers love gear and gadgets. If it is excess and even somewhat interesting or useful, it will find its way into someone’s privately owned vehicle (POV) and maybe to the nearest surplus store. Develop controls to protect against the temptation of seemingly zero-consequence pilferage.

### **Match the Battalion’s Task Organization to the Mission**

Accept that you are now in the export business. Be audacious and build your organization to do two things: move property and move people. Set gates to ensure all companies are at the same or nearly the same point in the process when any new task/organization takes effect. If A Company still has a basement full of supplies and has not updated PBUSE, then the inactivation cadre will waste precious time catching that company up when the companies merge.

Identify the commander and the cadre as early as possible. Company commanders, XOs, and the S4 make up the field of candidates for the role of inactivation commander. Every other key leader in the battalion will quickly disappear and move on to non-inactivating units. Numerous factors will determine the best choice, but whoever is chosen will remain until the bitter end.

Each company XO and supply team, of course, needs to be added to the cadre. However, if an XO, supply sergeant, or clerk is not a highly competent property manager, let her or him move on. A bad transaction can easily do more damage than good. Perhaps the most important is to crown one supply sergeant as the king of the hill. Rank immaterial, the most organized supply sergeant with the best relationships on the installation is my choice 10 times out of 10. Do not overlook the S4 NCOIC for this role.

Ensure enough Soldiers are added to the inactivation cadre to facilitate lateral transfers. To build a fast and agile labor platoon, the NCOs and Soldiers must be unburdened by physical profiles or recurring appointments and be capable of operating with minimal guidance.

### **Consolidate Property**

The seemingly obvious technique for property management is for company XOs to own their respective companies’ unit identification codes (UICs) as primary hand receipt holders. As an advantage, this structure maximizes time at the front end by allowing individual companies to pursue turn-ins and transfers early in the process. In fact, this is the course my battalion pursued.

Later, we realized the flexibility we gained actually de-synchronized our collective progress and restricted our ability to mass and concentrate along lines of effort. More time was lost in the long run as supply teams from each company fought the same battles to move the same equipment while needing the same support assets. The S4 had far more coordinations to make and transactions to track than was necessary.

Based on that experience, I recommend the following configuration: the inactivation commander is the primary hand receipt holder of all the battalion property. The XOs are sub-hand receipt holders but not of their previous companies' property. Instead, the commander sub-hand receipts property to the XOs by LIN. This, of course, requires significant effort in the form of more inventories. The payoff, though, will be obvious when entire LINs of property are turned in and transferred off the property book.

For example, the A Company XO signs for all high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs), medium tactical vehicles (MTVs), water trailers, M4 rifles, and M240 machine guns. The B Company XO signs for all commo equipment, tents, and optics. And so on. This enables each XO to focus on finding "buyers" for only a handful of LINs instead of each XO finding "buyers" for every LIN. Additionally, this arrangement allows the closure of the other companies' UICs, meaning many green boxes on the brigade's tracker.

### **Reduce your Footprint**

The installation property book office (IPBO) requires buildings to be in a high state of repair for turn-in. Walls must be painted, broken windows fixed, and four keys on hand per locking door. Many man-hours are needed, so it is better to do the work of getting smaller while the battalion is still large. Do not get caught with only your inactivation cadre remaining to turn in hundreds of desks, chairs, lockers, shelves, conference room tables, and fake trees with no vehicles or licensed drivers available. Phase IPBO turn-ins to match the departure of troops from the unit.

Arms rooms are treated separately from their parent buildings. Prepare the memos, schedule the inspections, and turn them in whether the larger building is ready or not. Be careful, though, not to consolidate sensitive items into one arms room before you are ready. Sharing arms rooms among UICs is procedurally and practically complicated.

Ultimately, the inactivation cadre will occupy one or two offices in a building that the brigade owns. Emptying and clearing the battalion motor pool is a big obstacle to that end. Do not delay closing the motor pool for the sake of a few trucks and trailers. If you must park vehicles in the company area, so be it. To speed the process, send Soldiers to help the maintenance team as they execute vehicle services and their own inactivation.

When and if another sequestration forces additional cuts to the Army's formations, all Soldiers will cross their fingers in the hope that their unit is left intact. When and if that sequestration includes the inactivation of your unit, I am hopeful that this article will provide some measure of assistance in making that process more manageable. Finally, I leave you with 10 tips to make the actual movement of property easier. As with the rest, I learned most of these lessons the hard way.

### **Thoughts on Transfers and Turn-ins**

1. Find logical "buyers." For combatives gear, try the fight house.
2. The fastest transfer or turn-in is the best; in the end, it does not matter who takes your property. If the fight house will take your gear next week, but the chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, explosives (CBRNE) unit will take it today... it looks like a rumble in the gas chamber to me.

3. Train and license every member of the inactivation cadre for cargo vehicles; most property can be moved by POV but not all.
4. Prioritize the transfer of unique S6 equipment; it is the hardest to transfer because either no one knows what the equipment actually is or it is an outdated version.
5. Do not turn in equipment due for reset — transfer it.
6. Off-post lateral transfers are the most painful process in the history of humankind. Before your division is forced to find a unit on the other side of the world to take your equipment, exhaust every means to transfer it locally.
7. For off-post lateral transfers, send a Soldier to hand-walk the transaction through to completion. Without a hands-on system, you will not see your DA 3161s for a very long time.
8. Get a head start on vehicle and generator maintenance and services. Many of the 4-2 SBCT Strykers required significant work to be turn-in ready.
9. Use the Directorate of Logistics (DOL), the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA, formerly known as DRMO — the Defense Reutilization and Marketing Office), and IPBO to get rid of as much as you can before those resources are closed.
10. Except computers and printers for the inactivation cadre, do not hold equipment or installation property in reserve once the commanders and battalion staff have left the unit.

At the time this article was written, **CPT Aubrey Ingalls** was attending the Maneuver Captains Career Course at Fort Benning, Ga. He currently is serving as commander of A Company, 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, Fort Polk, La. He served as XO of 4-9 IN, 4-2 SBCT at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. CPT Ingalls has a bachelor's degree in English from Kennesaw State University in Georgia.