

Special Subjects Department
UNITED STATES ARMY INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

STUDENT MONOGRAPH
Infantry Officers Advanced Course
CLASS NR 2
1958

IS THE ARMY SYSTEM OF EVALUATION OF
PERFORMANCE AND PROFICIENCY OF BATTLE
GROUPS AND LOWER UNITS ADEQUATE?

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Roster NR 155

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PREFACE

20 May 1958

The author wishes to express his appreciation for the assistance rendered by the staff of the United States Army Infantry School Library. The ability and cooperative spirit of this group of people is highly commended.

The point of view expressed in this paper is that of the author - not necessarily that of the United States Army Infantry School or the United States Army.


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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this monograph is to answer the question posed in the subject, and thereby to determine the validity of the present Army system of evaluating the performance and proficiency of battle groups and lower units. The subject suggests exploration of these closely related but separate fields; the command inspection, the annual general inspection, and the training test. It is realized that this subject is very broad and to explore all aspects of the subject as stated would exceed the limitations of time and length imposed on the author. Also, the problem of logically attacking simultaneously these three fields would be very difficult.

The author realizes the importance of this entire field, but for the reasons stated above this paper will limit itself to an analysis of only the command inspection and the annual general inspection. These two systems of evaluation are very closely related and will be discussed together under the general term of "inspections". The primary interest here is in battle groups and smaller units. The reader must realize, however, that the proficiency and performance of any infantry unit is largely determined by the performance and proficiency of the small units that make up the entire organization. Therefore, this discussion may be applied to units of all sizes and even of other types. The author further feels that examples may be drawn from other sizes and types of units and may be validly applied to this analysis.

In order to provide a common ground on which to base further discussion, this paper will review for the reader the regulations within which the inspection program is established. An evaluation of inspection

programs and policies as they exist in the units will be examined from the standpoint of the commander level originating the inspection, and also the unit being inspected. The objective of the discussion will be to determine what kind of a job the present Army inspection system is doing, and in what areas, if any, improvements can be made.

The author found the subject difficult to research, and was limited to some extent by a relative lack of experience in the field. The result is a heavy reliance on experiences and writings of other officers and non-commissioned officers in this field. It is admitted that part of this reference material reflects opinion only, but it reflects basic dissatisfaction with the system by experienced leaders. The only true evaluation of proficiency and performance is to put the unit in a combat situation, and compare its performance there with previous inspection results. Because it would be impossible to do this, the opinions of military men working with the present system must be relied upon.

specific subjects or phases of activity. The unlimited special inspection is conducted in addition to the annual general, and is not limited to any particular subject.

The general objectives of these inspections are as follows: (1) to provide the Secretary of the Army and Chief of Staff with an independent appraisal of the overall efficiency of performance of assigned mission and the status of the discipline of personnel, and (2) to report observed deficiencies and irregularities and recommend corrective action. (1:6, 7)

The command inspection, as the name implies, is an inspection performed by the commander or his representative. The scope of this inspection is determined by the commander concerned and is limited only by the area of the commander's responsibility. An example of this type inspection is the command maintenance inspection. This type determines the following: (1) serviceability, proper usage, and operational readiness of a unit's major items of equipment, (2) adequacy and effectiveness of organic and field maintenance, (3) efficiency of repair parts supply, and (4) proficiency of unit maintenance personnel. An annual inspection of this type is required on at least 50 percent of the items of a particular type of equipment. If as few as five items of a certain type are issued to a unit, 100 percent will be inspected. (3:2)

The commander having responsibility for field maintenance will conduct the maintenance spot check inspection. It is performed specifically to determine effectiveness of organizational maintenance and should not be confused with the random spot checks made by a small unit commander within his unit. The spot check inspection will be accomplished annually approximately six months after the annual technical inspection and will include at least 10 percent of each type equipment in each unit.

Every commander is responsible for the military instruction of all personnel, units and activities under his command, as well as for the preparation and readiness of units for active field service. (2:2) To discharge this responsibility he conducts tactical and training inspections.

These will include observation of the solution by units and individuals of tactical, field firing, supply, and communications exercises. Some of the objectives he should accomplish are as follows: (1) insure that approved doctrines and techniques are taught, (2) insure that approved methods and techniques are used by competent instructors, (3) insure best use of available facilities, (4) discover need for facilities, (5) rate appearance and conduct of personnel, and (6) check on quality and quantity of equipment and personnel. (2:1)

The above outline of inspections as provided for in army regulations is not complete in every detail but gives an idea of the scope, purpose and objectives of the program. No areas are overlooked, and the framework provided for is certainly wide enough to accomplish evaluation of performance and proficiency of a unit. As is readily seen, the commander is allowed a wide latitude in the manner in which he carries out his responsibility in this area. Certainly no person could argue that the commander should be told in detail exactly how he should accomplish an assigned tactical mission. It therefore follows that he should have equal freedom of action in establishing an inspection program to determine his unit's readiness to accomplish that mission. The system as outlined certainly allows a large amount of freedom to the commander. Although a minimum number of inspections is prescribed, no restriction is imposed on him as to how many he may make. If the present system of military inspections is not adequately evaluating units, the probable area where fallacies exist is in the methods used by commanders.

Talking about inspections with junior officers with varied backgrounds and experiences reveals much of the nature of inspections they and their units have undergone. Also, articles and letters by small unit commanders in service magazines seem to reveal a widespread dissatisfaction with inspections and inspecting officers. An examination of some typical inspection situations reveals some interesting points. A brief description of the situation will be followed by discussion to determine what,

if any, fallacies exist. Where possible, the discussion will cover the inspection from the points of view of both the inspected and the inspecting participants.

A rather common complaint by a small unit commander is as follows: "Some months ago I sat through a critique of a major command inspection of my infantry unit. I was bothered by what I saw and heard. The major deficiencies discussed were something like this: beds needed repair; sinks lacked stoppers; clothing was not marked; progress charts were not uniform; a good piece of chicken had been found in the "edible garbage". This inspection was supposed to measure the unit's combat effectiveness. Rocks were whitewashed, floors waxed, and shoes shined, so we made out pretty well. But not once during the critique, or during the inspection, was the question raised of whether or not the unit was combat effective. Inspectors were concerned about the police of the area and had no regard for what I thought was the basic mission of an infantry unit. No comment was made as to how well the men were trained; whether they could handle their weapons; when they last threw hand grenades or tested gas masks (or if they even knew how)". (6:29)

This quotation describes a feeling not uncommon among commanders following small unit inspections. The comment might be heard that this is a typical complaint from a commander who has a mediocre outfit and has failed to pass an inspection, but he goes on to say that whitewashed rocks, and waxed floors, among other things, pulled him through. The deficiencies noted probably meant only the difference between an outstanding report and one less complimentary. How important are clothing marks and uniformity of progress charts in comparing the readiness and effectiveness of two units? Can an inspecting officer check such insignificant items and still, in the time allotted, thoroughly check the items that really count?

"... the inspection is Class A with rifles outside and full field on bunks inside. The colonel gets to look at everything. Get the extra

shoes over to the cobblers for new heels. The supply sergeant will finagle new shelter halves - at least for the inspection. Bleach out the tent pins with salt so they're white. Start on the mess gear right now - get it burnished. Get the clothing stamped with the last four digits of the serial number. Watch those rifle stocks, look for dirt on the butt plates." (9:25, 26)

This author goes on to say that apparently training went on as usual, but a keen observer would have noticed a thinning of the company ranks as it marched to and from the training area. Soldiers returned to duty from sick call suddenly started finding that "duty" meant spreading paint in the mess hall instead of returning directly to scheduled training. (9:26)

An appropriate comment here might be that there is no excuse for allowing troops to miss training, and a unit that is good will not have to resort to such drastic measures; however, experience proves that dirt stained tent pins and water marked mess gear are not conducive to "best company in the battle group" type inspection reports. Because normal care and cleaning will not produce desired results on such equipment, the commander has little choice but to divert extra effort towards elimination of the source of such inspection "gigs". Eventually, of course, the commander's training records will show that missed training was made up, but seldom is make-up training as well presented or as well received as the original. An inspection that requires such emphasis on preparation is detrimental to performance and proficiency of a unit, and these are the very things that the inspection is designed to evaluate.

Several years ago the training at a large army post underwent a major annual inspection. The training at this post was always good, but final preparation for this inspection required several weeks to get the results desired. These preparations were given such emphasis that all personnel worked late at night and on weekends to meet deadlines. Rather than having a good serviceable coat of paint, everything had to show signs of being freshly painted for this inspection. Due to shortages of instructors,

some of the training problems were not, and never had been, assigned the number of instructors called for in the lesson plans. To eliminate this discrepancy, additional enlisted men were extracted from companies on a temporary basis. These men were outfitted with white helmets normally reserved only for instructors. It was a simple matter to carry these people around in a truck ahead of the carefully scheduled inspection visits and thereby have sufficient "instructors" on hand at each problem.

The author has first-hand knowledge of one problem at which a recoilless rifle firing order of selected personnel was rehearsed ahead of time in a dry run and then held on the ready line to be fired when the inspection team arrived. Thus, no discrepancies could develop in the operation during the visit.

It might be claimed that such false showmanship, as mentioned above, could not escape the attention of the inspecting officers, but the inspection reports indicated that the desired effect was obtained. Certainly, one of the things this inspection should have determined was a lack of qualified instructor personnel. The foresight of those in charge of training prevented this. The rehearsal of a firing order did not give a true picture of the status of training. The characteristic of this inspection which encouraged such gross deception was the announced intention of the inspecting party to follow a rigid time schedule. One of the advantages claimed for this type of inspection is that it shows what the unit can do if given time to prepare. Sometimes preparations for a scheduled inspection go beyond that needed to accomplish the mission.

A common error made by commanders in conducting inspections is inherent in the idea that junior leaders learn from making inspections in areas in which they have limited experience. This statement is certainly true, but the commander who assigns an inexperienced man to an inspection has committed a grave error unless he meets one additional responsibility. He must insure that an officer so assigned does most of his learning while preparing to make the inspection and not during the inspection itself. If necessary,

the commander should personally instruct the individual to insure that he not only understands what he is doing, but can adequately evaluate what he sees.

A review of the above inspection situations reveals many interesting things about the system used to evaluate performance and proficiency of units. It is well known that competition among units for top inspection ratings is very keen. Under the present system it is necessary, in order to get good reports, to emphasize items during the preparation that are not really important. These minor things must be worked on to give the unit the advantage on the inspector's rating. All commanders desire good reports and as long as such insignificant items are checked, they have no choice. The solution then, is an elimination from inspection checklists of items that can be influenced by so called "eye-wash". This is difficult, but increased emphasis by commanders initiating inspections is necessary. Certainly, the commander cannot make the change at the unit level. The initiating commander at each level must realize that a problem exists and furnish the impetus. Only those areas in a unit which are reflected in the proficiency and readiness of a unit should be evaluated. Points noted as obvious attempts at "eye-wash" should be recorded on the negative rather than the positive side of the report. Thus they would accurately reflect the negative effect that they actually have on overall efficiency of a unit.

Consideration should be given to placing greater emphasis on frequent unscheduled inspections. Scheduled inspections fill a need in showing what a unit can do but also encourage a certain amount of deception. Frequent unscheduled inspections tend to keep a unit in good shape, and a unit that is always ready doesn't need extensive preparation for any inspection. The common procedure is for every level of command to schedule an inspection to insure readiness for arrival of the next higher commander. This inspection cycle generally leaves a small unit over-inspected and the final visit takes place in an atmosphere of apprehension

and tension. This tends to promote the feeling among the members of a unit that a period of relaxation is in order as soon as the inspection is over. This results in a period of back-sliding efficiency which necessitates another period of frenzied activity before the next one. (5:71, 72)

Inexperienced personnel no doubt do gain knowledge and experience from making inspections, but commanders must insure that most of the knowledge is gained prior to the inspection. To insure adequate evaluation of the particular phase of operation to be inspected, the commander must take the necessary steps to instruct and train potential inspecting officers.

"... Make 'em unannounced; make them thorough; stop nit-picking; make sure inspectors know what they are doing; measure the combat effectiveness of a unit and not its whitewashing. Don't bother subordinates with a lot of unnecessary, regulation-satisfying inspections. When you want a unit inspected send some one who knows what he is doing and what to look for." (6:31)

CONCLUSIONS

The system of evaluating a unit's performance and proficiency, as provided for in regulations, is adequate. It allows the commander sufficient variety of inspections to meet the requirement. The commander must meet certain minimum requirements, but beyond this he can use his discretion as to the number of inspections he makes.

Discrepancies exist in the way the inspection program is carried out. ~~E~~mpphasis should be placed on items that truly evaluate readiness. This will give the commander more time to concentrate on the important items that determine the readiness of his unit.

More non-scheduled inspections should be made to determine the true conditions and maintain within the unit a steady effort towards unit effectiveness.

The commander must insure use of adequately trained inspection personnel to reap the full benefit of his inspection program.

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