

Battalion Officer School

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The Army needs to find ways to promote the professional development of its junior officers, and a battalion officer school could be one of the most important ways. Such a school, if organized properly, would bridge the gap between the formal instruction offered by the service schools and the training provided by the unit itself. It could also be the key to developing and maintaining a high degree of professionalism in the battalion's officers.

A battalion school would give the commander a chance to present specific subjects in detail to refine the knowledge and skill of his junior officers. He could also use it to accelerate their professional development process as well as to raise the quality of all of the officers in the battalion.

To achieve these objectives, the school's program should have both immediate and long range goals. First, it should concentrate on helping to improve an officer's technical proficiency so that he can be more effective within his unit, in garrison or in the field. As a long range goal, each officer should be groomed to assume positions of greater responsibility on short notice.

The battalion school should include three main subject areas — professional reading, oral and written communications, and meeting performance standards.

Each officer in the Army should be well-read in his profession and should be able to express himself both in writing and in his oral communications, especially when giving instructions to his subordinates. And he should be fully capable of meeting the

performance standards for his grade and mission.

READING

In the first phase of the program, the battalion's S3 could develop a comprehensive reading list for all of the battalion's officers. As a starting point, the U.S. Army Infantry School's recommended reading list of titles could be used. Reading in the history of the profession of arms is always useful in understanding the past as a foundation for the present and the future. And through such reading young officers can also gain an understanding of the dynamics of battlefield leadership, of the tactics used in a given piece of terrain, or of the key links in the development of a unit's esprit and heritage.

At the same time, the relevant regulations, training techniques, and command information items, which can be provided by the Command Sergeant Major, would certainly help the new officer become better acquainted with garrison procedures.

An officer might be required to select up to three titles from the recommended list of publications — perhaps a historical work, a chapter from a how-to-fight manual, and a regulation. He should be given a specified time limit, such as 30 days, in which to complete reading them.

WRITTEN AND ORAL EXPRESSION

In the writing phase of the course, the officer should be required to

prepare a brief on each of his readings, similar to a book report. It would be presented to the officer's rater, who would be responsible for checking its quality and adherence to the program before forwarding the brief to the battalion commander.

In addition, the battalion commander might designate certain subject areas to be presented orally. At an informal officer's call, the designated officer would brief his contemporaries on his assigned subject. In this way, the briefing officer would learn the dynamics of a military briefing and develop confidence and poise in the process. He would also learn the value of being well prepared.

As a side benefit, the battalion commander would be able to develop a group of subject matter experts who could then disseminate their knowledge throughout the battalion. The result should be a gradual improvement in the quality of training that would benefit the entire battalion.

PERFORMANCE TESTING

In the final phase of the program, all the officers involved in it should be tested on the depth of their professional knowledge. This knowledge should include both tactics and administration; the well-rounded officer should excel in both.

The tactics test might be organized according to the individual officer's duty position. A rifle platoon leader, for example, might be tested on platoon procedures in a defensive scheme of maneuver, and also on

what he would do if he were selected "on-the-spot" to be a company executive officer or a weapons platoon leader. He might be required to run a reaction course or to run a certain distance in a specified time.

A similar process could be used to test his knowledge of garrison and administrative procedures. He might be required to check on troop financial or promotion policies, to prepare elimination procedures, to perform as a survey officer, to supervise a supply room, or to inspect weapons, NBC equipment, and vehicles.

A battalion officer school organized in this fashion could be used to improve and sustain the quality of the battalion's officers and its effects should eventually be transmitted to

the battalion's NCOs as well. At the very least, the qualitative rating of the junior officers could be assured by comparing the individual against specific measurable goals. What is

more important, the school could provide the basis for a universal framework for developing leaders of high quality for an effective volunteer Army.



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Platoon Inventory

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After meeting his commander and receiving a briefing on the unit, a newly assigned lieutenant faces his first real challenge — conducting a 100 percent inventory of his platoon's equipment. His signature on that inventory will mark the final step in his full assumption of responsibility for his platoon, and he should take care to do it right.

His first step in the inventory process should be to get together with the experts — the battalion S4 or the property book officer, the company executive officer, and the company supply sergeant. Thirty minutes with an expert can unravel what at first may look like an insurmountable problem. During the discussion, he should ask them about any recent change or problem that could affect the inventory.

At the same time, he should obtain from them the current technical manuals, supply bulletins, supply catalogs, and any other publications he will need to conduct the inventory. In addition, he must make certain that the appropriate TM for each piece of equipment, along with its publication date, appears on the master hand receipt.

These publications are essential; without them an inventory is a waste of time, because they describe the equipment through photographs and equipment listings. The major components of the equipment must be reviewed with reference to both the descriptive pictures and the BII (basic issue items) list.

This advice cannot be stressed too strongly. Failure to use the current publications in the inventory process

is probably the most common mistake a new platoon leader makes, and the most costly. He should therefore follow the rule: "If you ain't got the book, don't look."

Once he is satisfied that he is sufficiently educated and equipped, the lieutenant can begin the formal inventory process.

A change of command inventory is a joint mission. It should be done with both the outgoing and the incoming officers present; it should not be conducted if one or the other is absent. A sufficient amount of time should be set aside for the inventory, and the entire process should be well organized. Unrelated tasks must be set aside until the inventory has been finished.

All items that are to be inventoried — that must be counted — should be