

Good Maintenance

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Any commander has to do a juggling act with his various requirements, and to keep from fumbling and dropping one of them, he also has to be able to carefully balance his allocations of time, manpower, and supplies.

Two of the most fragile of these requirements are maintenance and training. If a commander drops either, or both, his career could also be shattered. And of the two, the one commanders are most likely to drop is maintenance.

But this need not happen, of course. No infantry unit commander should ever fumble his maintenance requirement, and he won't if he develops a good unit maintenance program for his vehicles.

To have a good program, a commander must first decide exactly what the term means. Too many commanders do not think beyond the traditional benchmark — a 90 percent operationally ready (OR) rate. But they should, because a good vehicle maintenance program is much more — it is an efficient, effective, and self-perpetuating system of service and repair that discovers and immediately corrects any fault on any piece of equipment. Thus, the cause — good maintenance — can be separated from the effect — a high OR rate. This, in turn, should keep sporadic periods of intense activity from masquerading as good maintenance, although its results may well be a spectacular and heartening rise in the OR rate.

Too often, unfortunately, vehicle

maintenance operations are inefficient operations, usually because inefficient procedures have become entrenched, and no one wants to change the way things have always been done. For example, the prescribed load list (PLL) operation in many units is grossly inefficient, and the commanders of those units frequently fail to realize how much that inefficiency can detract from their entire maintenance program. A good vehicle maintenance program starts with a good PLL operation, and it will pay important dividends to a unit commander if he examines that operation with a critical eye.

PLL CLERK

It is absolutely essential for the PLL clerk to be extremely capable. If he is not well trained, an intensive training program for him must be started — immediately. If he cannot do the job to the exacting standards laid down in Army Regulation 710-2, he should be replaced.

In this job, motivation and desire to excel far outweigh the need for any formal MOS schooling. Motivated soldiers can do well as PLL clerks with only a minimum amount of formal training; poorly motivated soldiers will never be good PLL clerks, regardless of how much formal schooling they may get.

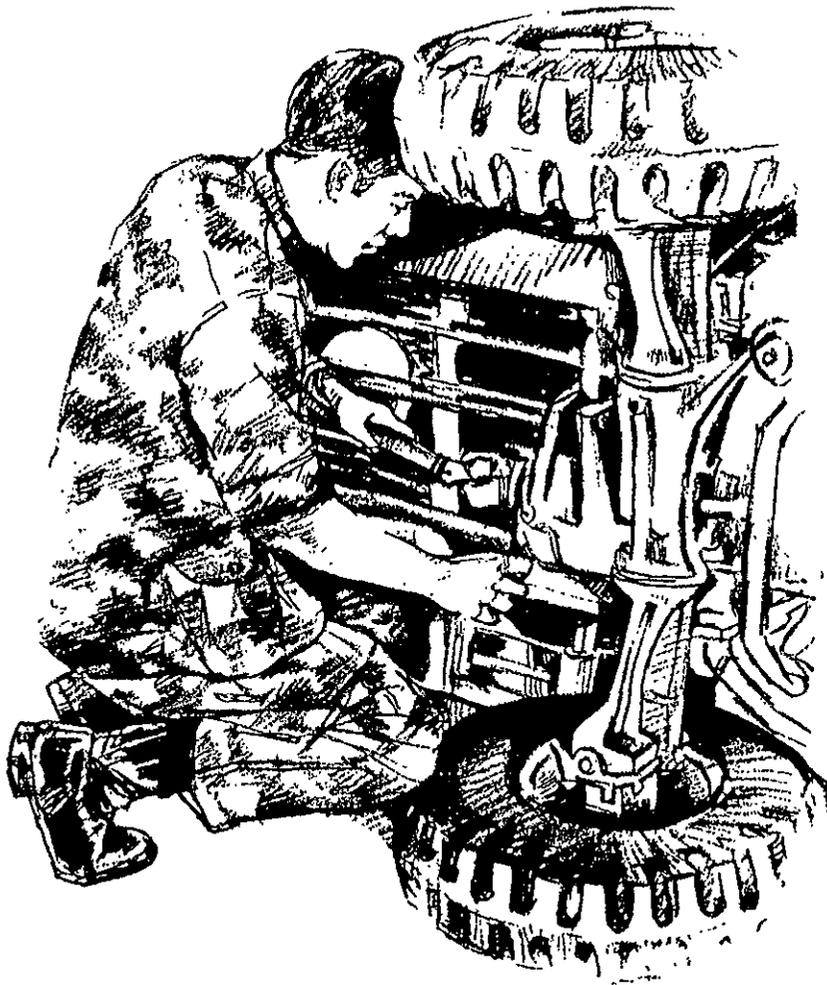
It is important, too, for PLL items to be stored as close as possible to the area where the actual repair work is to be done. In the field, this means hav-

ing the PLL items loaded on vehicles that can move to a particular job site, or to a location that is central to several repair sites. In garrison, it means having PLL items either on or adjacent to the workshop floor.

PLL items must also be secured so they cannot be reached by unauthorized personnel. A mechanic, for instance, should not be able to get a part unless his PLL clerk knows about it and properly annotates the transaction. Otherwise, the PLL clerk's time will be wasted, because he will then have to perform unnecessary inventories and he will not be able to provide replacement parts when they are needed.

A highly motivated PLL clerk can do much to create an efficient maintenance operation — his PLL items are on or near the shop floor, his records and forms are prepared in accordance with regulations, he has no worry about the pilferage of parts, and he maintains a good working relationship with his unit's direct support unit.

An effective maintenance operation, on the other hand, can best be achieved by combining command interest with systematic review. Thus, a unit's maintenance operation should be supervised by the chain of command from the lowest to the highest level. This does not mean that a commander must set up his office in his maintenance area. It does mean that he must demonstrate to everyone in the unit that he considers maintenance critically important. He should demand that maintenance must be done continuously and well, and he must



hold everyone in the unit's chain of command responsible for making certain that the proper maintenance is performed on each vehicle. Even his most junior NCOs should understand what is expected of them. The least effective maintenance operation is the one that has privates in the motor pool and the sergeants in the mess hall, yet that is all too common in many units.

Systematic review can be achieved if everyone in the unit who is concerned with maintenance strictly adheres to the procedures outlined in TM 38-750, The Army Maintenance Management System. This manual says that a piece of equipment must be inspected by an operator before it is used and that the results of the inspection, listing any and all repairs needed, must be record-

ed on a DD Form 2404.

The DD 2404, therefore, is the backbone of any systematic review program. Accordingly, a unit should establish a system whereby the generation, flow, and disposition of DD 2404s are strictly controlled. (See INFANTRY, May-June 1983, pages 13-15.) In addition, other inspections — monthly or quarterly, for instance — should be performed by personnel who are more technically qualified than the operators; these inspections should ensure that equipment problems are located and remedied before they can cause the failure of any component part. These inspections should not duplicate the operators' efforts, but should concentrate on areas in which the operators

are not technically qualified to determine if a fault exists.

The third element of a good maintenance program — self perpetuation — is a function of training. When a commander complains about maintenance taking up his training time, he should remember that maintenance is also training. A unit that has the best maintenance program in the Army today but does not have a *maintenance training* program will soon have, because of normal personnel turnover, no maintenance program at all.

A unit's maintenance training has to focus on the operator's manual for a particular vehicle. Soldiers should be trained by their section or squad leaders; those leaders should be trained by their platoon sergeants to inspect the vehicles and to properly complete the DD 2404s; and the platoon sergeants, in turn, should be taught by the platoon leaders and company commanders how to spot check and correct improper maintenance procedures. Only this will ensure that the unit will continually produce the trained operators it needs.

Unit mechanics, of course, also play a vital role in any maintenance effort. But without a system in which everyone in the chain of command is trained and motivated to supervise operators in maintaining their equipment, the efforts of these few men will be lost.

None of these requirements for good maintenance are new; none are revolutionary. They are nothing more than common sense ways of improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and self-perpetuation of a good vehicle maintenance program. If those three elements are present in his program, an infantry unit commander can rest assured that his unit's vehicles will be able to function effectively whenever he needs them.

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