

Company Initial Training Program Integrating Newly Assigned Soldiers

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A crucial task of any group or culture is the initial socialization of its new members. Many units underrate the initial reception and conditioning of soldiers at their duty station and thus may fail to properly integrate them. As a result, these units suffer unnecessary attrition and spend too much time reviewing basic Skill Level 1 tasks. I propose the institution of a company-level initial training program to help overcome some of these problems.

All leaders would like to have newly assigned personnel arrive with experience and knowledge of the unit's weapons, equipment, and tactics. But what they usually get is about one experienced soldier out of 20. The rest are privates, fresh out of basic and advanced individual training (AIT). Al-

though the Infantry's initial training does a fine job of teaching a new recruit basic soldier skills and giving him a basic understanding of the "culture" he is about to enter, this training does not give him enough knowledge and experience to be a successful soldier.

A new soldier receives little formal training on equipment and tactics. The lack of resources and funding now precludes assigning every basic trainee his own set of night observation devices (NODs), laser designator, and optical rifle scope. His only experience with NODs in basic training or AIT is putting one on his head and firing a weapon equipped with an AN/PAQ-2 aiming light. His knowledge of urban tactics consists of how to put down covering fire when crossing a street, how to

throw a grenade into a room, and perhaps how to climb into a second-story window. His first solid mission-oriented training comes after he arrives at his first duty station.

The Infantry as a whole must acknowledge that we are not likely to see any fundamental changes in the length or content of basic training and AIT. We should therefore embrace the idea that infantry leaders are responsible for the integration and education of new soldiers. If we properly teach newly assigned personnel the basic Skill Level 1 tasks and apply these skills during training, we will have a more solid foundation for mission success. Various programs, such as more selective recruiting, can improve the quality of the soldiers coming into the Army

and then to the company. But whatever the quality of the recruits and the process of basic training and AIT, it is the battalion's or the company's responsibility to train its new soldiers to operate as members of the infantry squad.

One example of such training is the Ranger Indoctrination Program (RIP)—the initial integration, training, and testing that recruits receive in the process of becoming Rangers. RIP was designed to give a soldier the basic skills to deploy immediately with a Ranger company. Although not all the new personnel in a Ranger battalion are Rangers qualified, they are supposed to be trained and sufficiently qualified to deploy with the battalion on any mission. The changing technology and techniques used by the Ranger Regiment today make it increasingly difficult to guarantee that new soldiers will be ready to join their platoons on a mission. The same is true of other infantry units.

An infantry battalion, and preferably the company as well, must share the burden of indoctrination training with the Infantry Training Brigade, where initial entry training takes place. In the Ranger Regiment, for example, it is the companies' responsibility to integrate new soldiers so that they not only survive their first year but are quickly prepared to deploy with a full understanding of all Ranger missions, tactics,

techniques, and procedures (TTPs), and a rudimentary knowledge of how to maintain mission-critical equipment. In conventional units the situation is very similar if one compares basic training and AIT with RIP. A new soldier must be ready to pick up a \$10,000 piece of equipment and use it to accomplish his—and hence his unit's—mission.

The concept of a "created culture" can help the command indoctrinate and integrate new soldiers into the infantry unit, thus expediting the process of initial qualification, the soldiers' participation in all aspects of training, and their ability to perform necessary details such as driver and range support functions. Currently, most companies have mixed success in teaching and instilling basic knowledge about techniques and maintenance. The initial qualification training a new soldier receives at the unit may take months, or require that the company change the training schedule to get him qualified, certified, or initially trained on equipment. The unrealized potential of the concept of a created culture is that leaders—who created the culture of the infantry in the first place—can modify and reinvent it to suit the changing conditions in which our soldiers must operate. As with most theories, this is not easily confirmed by quantitative measurements. It is best judged qualitatively, by our dedication to a unit and its mission, by the pride

we feel in being infantry soldiers, the respect given those who wear the blue cord or the Combat Infantryman's Badge, and by the esprit de corps we share.

For example, all Rangers must learn Ranger history in RIP. This gives them an idea of what they can expect when the unit is deployed in combat, and what is expected of them. This information and the Ranger Creed are the foundation of the Ranger Regiment's effectiveness. All infantry units have distinguished histories of which its members should be proud. The individual actions that earned each unit its recognition reflect characteristics (teamwork, dedication, proficiency, courage) that all good units share. We can capitalize on this concept so that new soldiers will have a model for their actions and a goal to strive for during training and war. Additional training concurrent with the socialization process would provide even more benefits.

Unfortunately, expectations of new personnel are low; the general model for their initial development in many units is, "Follow me and keep your mouth shut." A systematic integration and inprocessing program would set higher expectations for them and teach them information and doctrine in the basic areas we all must master: maintenance, tactics, regulations, and policies (from army level to company), and military history. Proper initial training in these areas would enable the command to conduct tasks and collective training beyond Skill Level 1. Given the time and turbulence involved in transferring individuals from unit to unit, conducting company-level initial inprocessing and training would allow leaders to assess and evaluate the new soldier's knowledge, skills (both military and non-military), and potential.

Just as basic training and AIT do not totally prepare new soldiers for what they may need at their first duty station, experienced soldiers going to a unit with a rapid deployment mission, or to another specialized unit need education on that specific unit's TTPs, formations, and tactical, maintenance, and administrative procedures. If a newly-arrived soldier hears only that he will "pick up



Newly assigned soldiers receive instruction in squad tactical training.

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this information in time," his morale, confidence, and effectiveness suffer. Although many NCOs transfer from similar units, many (especially the most important fighting leaders, the staff sergeants) do not adjust quickly to a new unit's equipment and missions.

The ideal solution is a company-level initial training program (ITP). The company's NCOs should develop the training plan, institute the instruction, and monitor the new soldiers' progress. A company level program would help socialize newly assigned personnel into their infantry unit, reinforce their identification with the company, and let them get to know the various leaders; it would also give experienced company NCOs an opportunity to develop their leadership and training skills.

Five principles should guide the development of a company ITP:

- The purpose should be to see that new personnel are fully processed and integrated into the company, the battalion, and the post. This would include the completion of paperwork, familiarization with the major post facilities, including family service organizations, and the complete issue of all equipment and gear.

- The program should cover the basics of equipment and equipment maintenance. All new soldiers should learn to operate and maintain such items as radios and global positioning system (GPS) receivers and the procedures to follow if they lose or damage something. Early instruction on the optics and lasers would let squad leaders spend less time reviewing these basics and more time developing the soldiers' shooting, movement, communication, and marksmanship skills. Additional instruction could be scheduled as time permits, and a monitored study hall could give the soldiers time to read and

understand policy letters, excerpts from manuals, and standing operating procedures (SOPs), and other important references.

- The program should cover all the basic training and qualification necessary for integrating the soldiers into the unit's mission. They should receive initial training qualifications, bus or stake bed driver training, and unit-specific licensing.

- The instructors should be designated by the First Sergeant and the platoon sergeants. Since all company NCOs have been through at least one NCO education system course, they should be able to teach any of the basic classes to the new soldiers. The company ITP duty could be treated as a standard duty rotation. The NCOs could be put on a DA-6 duty roster and rotated like the charge of quarters (CQ) or staff duty NCO. The First Sergeant would design a duty roster with blank dates and give the NCOs two or three days' notice of their teaching responsibilities. Since it takes a day or two to get new soldiers settled in and to coordinate resources for the ITP, the NCOs should have ample preparation time. (Senior specialists might also be considered instructors or assistant instructors.) If new soldiers arrived the day before a major exercise or deployment, it would be up to the top NCOs and the company commander to determine the program schedule. The training NCO should control and maintain the ITP.

- The course should last no longer than one week. Time permitting, additional days could be used to zero weapons and conduct a full or alternate qualification, and for familiarization fire with all the company's light weapons and sighting systems. The emphasis should be on getting the most critical training done first. Soldiers in positions

requiring particular aptitudes, such as sniper or computer operator, could be identified to receive further skill training later.

In the future, infantry units will have more technologically sophisticated equipment (an optic, a laser, and some form of NOD as standard items), more specialized and varied missions, and more operations other than war. Infantry companies need to reexamine their initial inprocessing. This will entail a thorough review of what the command wants from a soldier when he goes to a platoon: What administrative and maintenance information should he know? What initial qualifications and training does he need? How much mission information and TTPs are necessary for new personnel to become assets to their elements instead of training burdens?

Infantry leaders should deliberately and systematically train and socialize new soldiers to contribute to their company's mission within their first two or three weeks at a new assignment. Such prompt initial training will increase the soldiers' competence, confidence, and commitment to their companies. Second only to defeating the enemies of our country on the field of battle, our duty as leaders is to insure that those who wear the crossed rifles are mentored and challenged to join the Infantry's long line of distinguished soldiers.

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