

SLAYING THE PAPERWORK MONSTER

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Paperwork will always be with us. A deployed unit company commander will face many challenges, and his administrative responsibilities remain critical to the welfare of his Soldiers and their families. Poor management of personnel products, particularly in a combat zone, can be an incredible mission distracter, resulting in misallocated time resources and inaccurate Soldier administrative actions. There are several areas that require a commander's attention to successfully meet the demands of paperwork in a combat zone.

Awards

The administrative task that most affects morale downrange is the Army awards system. The commander is the first-line approval authority for awards leaving his company, and his signature is the first on the back of the DA Form 638. Commanders must do their best to anticipate requirements for award submissions in three areas.

□ *Achievement.* Before deploying, the commander should consider the requirements for awarding the various individual Army awards (including the criteria for awards for valor) to consider scenarios that he believes should result in a Soldier receiving a particular award. This will encourage the commander (and NCOs) to be on the lookout for actions that may merit special recognition. The Army's awards system is highlighted in Army Regulation 600-8-22.

□ *Service.* Every Soldier who successfully completes a tour in a combat zone is eligible to receive an award for his actions during that time period, as long as it does not cover any actions for which the Soldier has already received an award (AR 600-8-22). Typically, brigade and battalion commanders will establish general criteria for which they will approve service awards, including level of responsibility (not rank), service time period, and duty performance. To meet the desire for all service awards to be issued before redeployment and because of the high volume of awards in theater, initial submission of service awards can often be required by higher level commanders with only half of the deployment completed. Commanders should alert their platoons of this requirement and the necessity to record Soldier actions

early on to prepare service award documents.

□ *Post-Deployment Stop-Loss Departures.* To maximize time with family during the post-deployment recovery period, some commanders may require in-theater completion of PCS/ETS awards for those Soldiers departing the unit shortly after redeployment. Due to the new unit lifecycle requirements, some units could see as much as a 75-percent personnel turnover after redeployment. Finishing the requirements for their departure awards downrange, though an additional strain for the combat commander, ensures that both the Soldiers and the commander can focus on recovery (and not paperwork) upon redeployment. It also attempts to avoid the common mishap resulting in Soldiers departing a unit without receiving their PCS/ETS award.

OERs/NCOERs

Although the S-1 often will issue reminders and facilitate meeting deadlines, the commander is the primary person responsible for ensuring that his unit meets suspenses with regards to evaluation reports. There are many spreadsheet tools available that can aid the commander in determining his time hacks for OERs/NCOERs. Keeping an updated and detailed record of the performance of officers and NCOs he rates and senior rates will make for an easier transition when reports are required for unanticipated reasons (personnel moves, etc.). Of course, periodic written counseling performed by the commander will basically enable the OERs/NCOERs to "write themselves." Important tools for counseling are DA Form 2166-8-1 (March 2006 - NCOER Counseling and Support Form) and DA 67-9-1a (Junior Officer Developmental Support Form). Honest feedback and evaluation, particularly in combat, will contribute to creating a more efficient unit by developing good leaders into great ones and counseling poor performers. Proper written counseling can often mean the difference between whether an unprofessional and incompetent Soldier is rightly chaptered out of the Army or merely disciplined and shuffled to another unit.

Casualties

The unfortunate reality of combat demands that the commander

prepare for the issues that will arise when one of his Soldiers becomes a casualty. Standard Army procedure requires every Soldier to have two forms completed for use should he become a casualty: the DD93 (Record of Emergency Data) and VA Form SGLV-8286 (Service Member's Group Life Insurance Election and Certificate). The company commander should keep a copy of each of these forms on file in his company headquarters as well as with the battalion S-1 office for use during casualty incidents. More information, though, is required during casualty situations than these forms provide. For instance, after the family has been notified of a Soldier's non-life threatening battlefield injury, the commander may be required to call the family to personally inform them of the Soldier's status. Neither the DD93 nor SGLV-8286 contains requirements for the Soldier to identify the phone number for his next of kin. Additionally, important information, like location and disposition request of significant property such as automobiles in the event of a major injury, do not appear on these forms. Several units have created unit specific forms called "Blue Books," which are typically drafted by the unit S-1 and include requests for information such as the name of the Soldier's bank and any specific desires for burial. This is especially important since many Soldiers do not create wills before deploying to combat. Soldiers should be encouraged to update the "Blue Book" at least once during a 12-month combat tour.

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Leave/Pass

The Rest and Recuperation Leave Program is now a standard operation throughout the Army, and all Soldiers deploying on a 12-month tour will receive a standard 15-day leave to any destination in the world. Typically Soldiers are only authorized leave after 60 days in-theater and until 60 days prior to scheduled redeployment. Using that model, and the requirement that a commander must have no more than 10 percent of his force on leave or pass, the commander can draft a "tentative" leave plan for his company even before the deployment begins, thereby giving the families a general idea of when they can expect their Soldiers to return for leave activities. Those Soldiers with a specific family-oriented event, like the birth of a child, a wedding, or a child's graduation, should be given priority in selecting a tentative leave date over other Soldiers. It should be stressed to the families, though, that mission requirements can always cause changes in leave/redeployment calendars, and those Soldiers receiving disciplinary action while deployed will not be granted leave privileges. More information on the pass/leave programs can be found at www.armyg1.army.mil/WellBeing/RRLeave.

FRG Letter

One of the most important things a commander can do "administratively" during combat is to maintain good written communication with the families of the Soldiers. This can easily

be achieved by creating a mailing list for all the Soldiers' families in the company. Some Soldiers may be initially hesitant to allow their commander to send letters to their families, but the pay-off can be immense in terms of morale for the Soldiers. Although they will not talk about their own heroic actions, Soldiers want their families to know about the good things they are doing on a day-to-day basis down range; a good monthly update letter can help their families understand the achievements of your company's Soldiers. The battalion commander should typically give his approval before disseminating

any letters to family members, and caution should be used against dispensing the letter over e-mail as it could be altered by someone else before resending.

Unit History

An administrative task often overlooked is the compilation of data to develop the unit's narrative of its efforts in combat. The unit history and timeline that a commander creates about his company will be critical to his Soldiers' recovery and rehabilitation after combat. During combat operations, the commander has the best perspective of the company's combat operations — it is *his* company. Keeping a running journal of events from the command point of view, combined with Soldier input, media pieces about the unit, and after action reports, will result in a detailed reconstruction of the unit's activities and accomplishments after the deployment is complete.

Ops NCO

Though not officially task-organized to an infantry company, designating an operations NCO will greatly increase a commander's ability to accomplish administrative tasks with ease. The commander should choose an intelligent Soldier with computer and organizational skills. That specialist or sergeant becomes the company's liaison with the battalion S-1, as the commander and first sergeant will often be too busy with missions to focus significant attention on paperwork minutia. The operations NCO should be personally tied-in with the commander's administrative systems to avoid duplicating work.

Given the option, few commanders would choose to execute administrative and paperwork tasks rather than combat and mission-focused operations. Spending a short time prior to deployment preparing the systems to effectively manage administrative tasks in theater will allow the commander to focus on winning the fight against the enemy, instead of becoming decisively engaged with spreadsheets and FormFlow.

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