

The Ineffectiveness of the Total Army Sponsorship Program

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A moving truck at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, is unloaded as a military family moves into their new home. The "Making the Right Move" workshop assists service members and their families by informing them of what to expect at their next duty station and how to prepare for their travels. (Official DoD photo)

An influential article on leadership by 1st Sgt. Brian Baumgartner stated, "Team building is useful in the operational environment but it is also useful elsewhere because it creates a connection between the Soldiers."¹ This connection has to start with the sponsorship program.

TASP

The Total Army Sponsorship Program was designed to support newly assigned personnel moving from one military installation to another. This program is addressed in Army Regulation 600-8-8, in which it is mandated that all commanders institute and operate a sponsorship program: "The commanders of major Army commands (MACOMs) and field operating agencies will . . . Establish sponsorship programs throughout their command for all Soldiers."²

However, this program is still not fully implemented across the Army. Introduced in 2006, when many current company commanders were only young lieutenants with no involvement in the redeployment and replacement of Soldiers in combat, there is a concern that some of them remain uninformed as to the importance of TASP.

The Problem

The bottom line is, ineffectiveness in properly utilizing TASP is affecting Soldiers. In particular, it is the private, coming from Advanced Individual Training, who does not know where to go or what to do when reporting to a new unit, who needs the most help.

As it is now, the company sponsor picks up the Soldier from the replacement company after all in-processing is completed, inferring that brigade or battalion commands ignore ownership of the newly arrived Soldier by immediately pushing that responsibility down to the lowest level.

The ineffectiveness of this program also causes issues for NCOs. such as, sponsoring Soldiers for six months before their scheduled arrival only

to find out that they are assigned to the wrong unit or not receiving notice of a Soldier's pending arrival. This can cause undue strain on NCOs' time management, especially when they are in the final stages of training preparation.

Another Concern

While assigned as a company first sergeant, I found that TASP was only running at about 25 percent capacity at the division to brigade level, where I worked. Of the 173 Soldiers under my care, I found that only 30 of them had had some kind of sponsor involvement prior to my arrival in November 2015. After November 2015, I found that none of the newly assigned Soldiers coming straight from a basic training unit had completed their required Department of the Army DA Form 5434, "Sponsorship Program Counseling and Information Sheet," causing problems for the gaining units when they did not receive notification of issues needing attention when the new Soldiers arrived.

Young Soldiers, in this day-and-age, need to feel they are cared for. If the Army does not become more service-oriented in their attitude towards sponsorship, it will not retain the good-quality Soldiers it needs for the future.

Solving the Problem

So what is needed? Sponsorship training during One Station Unit Training is a start, but only filling out a DA Form 5434 is not enough instruction for new Soldiers to actually understand sponsorship and its importance. However, a one- to two-hour briefing describing the difficulties encountered during a permanent change of station and outlining the practical support that sponsors should provide will instill an appreciation and awareness of the program.

Another important step would be to establish brigade and battalion level TASP coordinators with the help of division headquarters. Division could identify, through an interview process held at division G1, a staff sergeant or above from each battalion for the position with at least two years longevity on station. Then the most viable candidates would go through a two-week training course held by the Human Resource Command Sponsorship Program to become the brigade subject matter experts and TASP coordinators.

In turn, brigade TASP coordinators, along with brigade S-1s, would identify and train battalion-level TASP coordinators. This would strengthen the weakest part of the current sponsorship program: communication failure between brigade and battalion.

Understandably, there is no Modified Table of Organization and Equipment position for this duty, but it can be assigned in a human resource G1/S1 section, if the sole purpose of that NCO is to be a sponsor, since the current practice of making it an additional duty is not working.

Once the brigade and battalion sponsorship coordinators are established and ready to assume their duties, coordination for incoming and outgoing Soldiers will flow through these two elements.

The battalion TASP coordinators will also conduct monthly briefings for outgoing Soldiers. During this briefing, Soldiers six months out will complete their DA Form 5434 through Army Career Tracker, along with all required out-processing documents. This removes any "what ifs" which may need to be considered before Soldiers are ready to move on to their next assignment.

In-processing responsibilities for incoming Soldiers will be shared between the division and brigade. The brigade TASP coordinators will monitor this process to ensure Soldiers and sponsors communicate and Soldier in-processing runs smoothly prior to reporting to their new unit. That way, incoming Soldiers are taken care of to the best of the sponsors' abilities and any issues with in-processing can be corrected by the brigade TASP coordinators who have direct communication with the division where the in-processing occurs.

Conclusion

We live in an ever-evolving world where the military changes at a rapid pace and TASP should as well. Recent requirements, for completed Section 3 on DA Form 5434 from receiving units, before allowing Soldiers to leave basic training, are not working. All they do is create haste and poor judgement over the correct sponsorship selection in order to get Soldiers moving to their initial duty station as quickly as possible. This does not exhibit the "all in" mentality necessary to care for and secure new Soldiers coming into their units.

The sponsorship program is a cornerstone for Soldiers throughout their military career. A typical Soldier will PCS at least twice during a simple four-year contract. In addition, the faster Soldiers are in-processed into their unit the more effective that unit will be in accomplishing the mission, making it a priority to ensure Soldiers' needs are met before and upon arrival at their new duty assignment.

Notes

1. Joe B. Parsons, ed., From One Leader to Another, Volume II. (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2016), 274.
2. Headquarters Department of the Army Washington, D.C., The Total Army Sponsorship Program, April 4, 2006, 1-4.f.2.
http://www.apd.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/r600_8_8.pdf (http://www.apd.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/r600_8_8.pdf)