



U.S. Army Sgt. Arjay Eduarte, a utilities equipment repairer with 103rd Troop Command, reviews a maintenance and inspection worksheet at Kihei, Hawaii, May 5, 2020. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Theresa Gualdarama)

The Army's Ethical Dilemma in Unit Reporting

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The Army has a dual nature as both a military department of government and a trusted military profession. The character of the Army as an institution and a profession are both essential to accomplishing the Army's mission. However, it is the American people's trust and confidence in the Army as an ethical profession that grants it the autonomy to exercise the disciplined initiative critical to accomplishing missions under diverse conditions around the world.

Department of the Army, 2019, p.1

Each Soldier's induction into the U.S. Army begins with lessons on the importance of values, ethos, and ethics regarding their actions and decisions. These principles are continuously imbedded into the training and education they receive throughout their career. Even with an emphasis on virtues and morality, Army leaders still face the ethical dilemma of reporting the facts accurately and truthfully. This article examines problems leaders face in unit reporting, its causes, impact on the force, and offers a solution that reflects

accurate Army readiness while also improving unit morale and encouraging honest reporting.

The Problem and its Impact on the Force

Over the last decade, the U.S. Army has encountered leaders who fail to report accurate unit training numbers possibly because they are forced to prioritize which requirements to complete to standard under unrealistic time limits (Wong & Gerras, 2015; Pernin et al., 2013). These unethical reporting practices not only apply to mandatory training

requirements, but also to maintenance, finance, supply, command inspections, the Travel Risk Planning System, and all other forms of official and unofficial reporting.

As an example, officer evaluation and noncommissioned officer support forms require an initial counseling and subsequent quarterly counseling. They must also be verified by three members of the chain of command; however, each year, many support forms are unethically reported (Kilner, 2017; “The Army Ethic White Paper,” 2014). Additionally, Dr. Wong and Dr. Gerras reported in their study almost all former battalion commanders and Department of the Army staff officers interviewed admitted they knew the information reported to them was inaccurate (Wong & Gerras, 2015).

Leaders who fail to apply the Army values when making decisions send a clear message to subordinates that values and ethics are expendable so long as they accomplish the mission. This ethical compromise erodes the trust and respect vital to the Army profession and subordinate/leader relationship. When morality is compromised, it opens the door to other unethical behaviors (Hoffmaster & Hooker, 2017).

The Department of Defense defines *operational readiness* as “the capability of a unit, weapons system, or piece of equipment to perform the missions or functions for which it is organized or designed for” (Cancian & Daniels, 2018, para. 2). The U.S. Army measures readiness by reporting on the status of equipment, personnel, and training measured against the modified table of organization and equipment. Reporting of exaggerated capabilities often distorts the actual state of the U.S. Army’s operational readiness (Pernin et al., 2013). Senior military leaders require accurate reporting of information to effectively manage personnel, equipment, and training of their forces. Furthermore, the reported state of readiness affects fiscal budgets, public perception, and effectiveness of enemy deterrence (Department of Defense, 2018).



U.S. Army Paratroopers with 173rd Airborne Brigade prepare to board CH-47 Chinook helicopters during Exercise Saber Junction at the 7th Army Training Command’s Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, Aug. 10, 2020. (U.S. Army photo by Gertrud Zach)



U.S. Army Pfc. Cesar Carreon, a stryker systems maintainer with 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, inspects a valve during maintenance operations at Fort Carson, Colorado, April 22, 2020. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. Daniel Parker)

The Root Cause

The culture of unethical reporting stems from the environment the U.S. Army has created with an excessive amount of mandatory training, collective training, tasks, directives, and a zero defect mentality (Mascia, 2020). Because of the Army’s zero defect mentality, leaders feel they have no option but to participate in unethical reporting practices to satisfy requirements or else be labeled a failure. A congressional report identified more than 1,000 Army directives, regulations, pamphlets, and messages addressing mandatory training. The report further stated senior Army leaders were unanimous in their assessment that the time available to commanders made it impossible to complete all mandatory training (National Commission on the Future of the Army, 2016). The Army’s pattern of excessive requirements forces leaders into a difficult position where they feel obligated to compromise their values to meet Army requirements (Saum-Manning et al., 2019).

The Solution

The first step in solving the problem is to identify that Soldiers and leaders are overwhelmed with the number of requirements and directives placed upon them. In 2018, former Secretary of the Army Mark Esper eliminated 14 mandatory training requirements such as media awareness and human relations training (Office of the Secretary of the Army, 2018). These policy changes reduced the time constraint, but according to interviews with 77 different company leaders, it was a good start; however, more needs to be done (South, 2019).

To solve the dilemma of inaccurate and unethical reporting, it is necessary to institute strategic-level policy change to Army training and reporting requirements. Leaders at the strategic level must scrutinize the entirety of required training and prioritize based on their impact and cumulative load (Wong & Gerras, 2015). Furthermore, by

reducing the number of mandatory training requirements, transferring reduced tasks to local command policy, and vetting *Army Regulation 350-1: Army Training and Leader Development*, units will receive a reprieve from unrealistic expectations (Department of the Army, 2017; National Committee on the Future of the Army, 2016). Only a change in current policy will free up the time needed to complete the Army's mandatory training requirements.

Conclusion

Overhauling the current Army readiness system by decreasing the Army's readiness requirements to realistic

and manageable levels will not decrease Army readiness. It will more accurately reflect readiness. It will build a culture of trust between leaders and subordinates, improve morale, and encourage more ethical decision-making and reporting. Leaders will no longer feel obligated to choose which training requirement to fulfill to standard and which to ignore, or unethically report. This change in policy would also display empathy and understanding because tactical level leaders and Soldiers would feel strategic leaders understood their environment. Only by understanding the Army's actual readiness level, can leaders accurately prepare for the future fight. ■

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