(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. James Geelen taken Aug. 5, 2019) U.S. Army Sgt. Heather Perez, a personnel readiness sergeant with 4th Special Troops Battalion, 4th Sustainment Brigade, assists a Soldier with their personnel records review at Fort Carson, Colorado, Aug. 5, 2019.

Why Personnel Records Matter: Preparing for IPPS-A

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As Soldiers are promoted and move up the ranks, their tasks and responsibilities increase. They are no longer just responsible for themselves, but also their subordinates. An often overlooked task is for leaders to ensure all personnel records are accurate. Incomplete or outdated records can lead to missing promotion points and inconsistent data between human resource (HR) systems.

This can cause incorrect pay, being overlooked during centralized promotion boards or nominative assignments, and incomplete service record issues after transitioning out of the service. Data accuracy for all Soldiers is imperative as the U.S. Army upgrades to the Integrated Personnel Pay System – Army (IPPS-A) and combines personnel, pay, and talent management capabilities into a single standardized system.

As a young Soldier, my platoon sergeant and squad leader showed me the importance of maintaining my personnel records. We reviewed items such as my Enlisted Record Brief, Personnel Qualification Record (PQR) (now obsolete), and Leave and Earnings Statement. They showed me how to get my source documents into my Army Military Human Resource Record (formerly microfiche) and explained why it was necessary and the career effect it would have. Having my data accurate in the previous microfiche format made for a smooth records transfer when the Army upgraded to the interactive Personnel Electronic Records Management Systems (iPERMS). This same data accuracy and leader mentorship is just as meaningful now as it was back then, especially as the Army transitions to IPPS-A.

My platoon sergeant and squad leader kept me motivated for continuous achievement and lifelong learning by helping me create an "I love me book" (a binder containing copies of all important personal and career documents such as awards, training certificates, and transcripts). This simple method of organization made sure my data was current and safe in case I had to correct errors to my personnel record. By keeping my information accurate, my platoon sergeant and squad leader could count on me to be prepared for deployments or even compete in Soldier of the Quarter boards. They could rely on my readiness because they took the time to mentor me, resulting in my smooth transition between HR systems. Those Soldiers who didn't prepare weren't as fortunate and created issues ultimately affecting unit readiness.

Maintenance

The concept of maintaining personnel records is similar to the actions of maintaining assigned equipment such as a weapon or tactical vehicle. The equipment needs periodic checks to ensure it is operational and ready to perform. The safety of the Soldier or crew operating the equipment depends on continued upkeep (Boyd, n.d.). Like a maintenance check, proper record management can be the difference in making a promotion point cutoff score, awarding proper beneficiary compensation should a casualty occur, or receiving timely and accurate pay.

Accuracy

Accuracy is necessary in nearly every aspect of being a Soldier, from marksmanship, land navigation, and mission planning, to pay, personnel records, and administrative benefits. So it is critical to keep personnel records up-to-date as they are more than just documents required for advancement. They also contain items such as Army Phys-

ical Fitness Test scores, weapons qualifications, authorized dependents, and life insurance beneficiaries. Some of these items may change throughout a career and should be thoroughly reviewed by each Soldier annually with an HR professional during a Personnel Records Review (PRR). Maintaining accurate records keeps Soldiers ready to deploy and focused on the mission, improving unit and overall Army readiness (Department of the Army, n.d.a.).

Preparation

As the Army continues to transform HR services and structure, processes and requirements of the past will change. Just as the PQR and microfiche previously mentioned disappeared with more modern HR systems like the Electronic Military Personnel Office (eMILPO) and iPERMS, the current set of HR tools will also soon change. Legacy systems eMILPO and Total Officer Personnel Management and Information System II will no longer exist, and Digital Training Management System and Army Training Requirements and Resources System (ATRRS) will all link to IPPS-A (Department of the Army, n.d.b; IPPS-A, 2020g). iPERMS will remain and must be closely monitored through a PRR to avoid benefit disruptions and provide accurate records for career development. IPPS-A will be much more than an "updated eMILPO." It will take the information currently stored and transfer it into a robust system requiring each Soldier and leader to understand its capabilities (IPPS-A, 2020a).

Now is the time to prepare for IPPS-A. With Release 3 (R3) tentatively scheduled for December 2021, HR professionals will begin training at the beginning of the 2021calendar year (IPPS-A, 2020f). Learning a new system will take time, especially with the capabilities IPPS-A offers (IPPS-A,2020c).
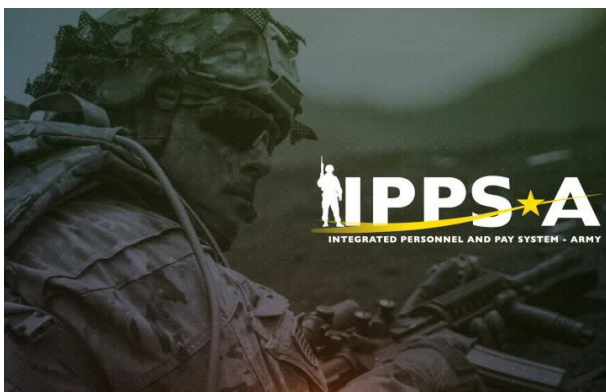
(U.S. Army graphic courtesy of IPPS-A)

It is essential to mitigate a surge in records updates by taking the time at the platoon and squad level to update data prior to the changeover. Organizational leadership should anticipate this scenario and use the coming months to make certain their Soldiers and organizations are prepared (IPPS-A,2020e).

There are some very specific tasks that can be completed now to successfully plan for R3:

1. Review Soldier Record Briefs with each team member. Show them what each section indicates and its relevance. Make sure each Soldier updates inaccuracies.
2. Log on to MilConnect and review data stored there (Department of the Army, n.d.c.). Among the many important items to check there is dependent information, life insurance elections, and personal contact information.

3. Review military training transcripts at the ATRRS. Confirming accurate information there ensures IPPS-A will come online with appropriate professional military education data (IPPS-A, 2020b).

Conclusion

The U.S. Army's conversion to a contemporary HR system is necessary to modernize and streamline the force (Thoma, 2020). A seamless transition falls upon leaders' shoulders to make sure their Soldiers are taken care of and are up-to-date. HR professionals are responsible for managing the system, assisting, and guiding, but each leader has the inherent responsibility to teach their Soldiers what right looks like.

For more information visit https://ipps-a.army.mil/ ∎

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