



Troops lay out basic issue items for an inventory, one of the many steps in managing Army property. (Photo by Rex Temple)

Leadership Training Gaps in Property Accountability

Officers are told, “You will learn that when you get to your unit,” but what happens when no one at the unit can teach needed property accountability skills?

■ By 1st Lt. Adam C. Crawford

With the Army’s constrained budget and constant fielding of new equipment, property accountability has become an increasingly hot topic. Brigade commanders want to know why basic issue items are on a shortage annex. They also are requiring more detailed reports on how company commanders are spending

their allocated budgets.

When I placed a cadet dot on my uniform and showed up for my first drill weekend with the Kentucky Army National Guard, I was given the following advice: As an officer, you can go to jail because of missing property. It was both a warning and a teaching tool—property is important.

As a quartermaster officer on active duty, I took comfort in knowing that I would be one of the Army’s subject matter experts on property accountability. But during the Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC), I received little more than three days of training on property accountability and a giant binder of notes and handouts.

The Army property system is complicated; it has to be in order to handle all of the equipment in our arsenal. Supply sergeants get extensive training on Property Book Unit Supply Enhanced in order to conduct supply transactions, such as ordering, transferring, and assigning equipment and to manage company commanders' extensive hand receipts (some valued at well over \$20 million).

But difficulties arise when junior officers are expected to manage sub-hand receipts with little to no training or understanding of property management and accountability.

Little Training, Less Mentorship

I spoke with officers from three Army branches (infantry, military intelligence, and logistics), and only the officer who graduated from the Ordnance BOLC (the logistics officer) had been given any formal training on property accountability.

All three captains claimed that they had received the same guidance concerning Army property accountability: You will learn that when you get to your unit.

This is a common statement heard during Army training, and it is true in many cases. However, when junior officers get to their units, they are sometimes trained by officers who were also given only on-the-job training for property accountability. Without formal training, junior leaders are being set up for difficulty in the early stages of their careers.

Do Not Pass Go

It has long been thought that the "you can go to jail because of property" statement was little more than a scare tactic. But Article 108 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Military Property of United States—Loss, Damage, Destruction, or Wrongful Disposition, states that anyone who sells, destroys, loses, or otherwise disposes of military property, either willfully or through neglect, without proper

authority is subject to punishment "as a court-martial may direct."

Army property accountability is a major undertaking, and it is an injustice for leaders not to receive proper training. Not understanding how the Army supply system works puts increased and unnecessary pressure on platoon leaders, compa-

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ny executive officers, and company commanders. It is often not until a mistake is made that the lesson is learned. Generally, this model is acceptable, but when it comes to the sensitivity of property, I think there is a better way.

The Way Forward

Each BOLC, no matter what branch, should have a minimum of five days of platoon-level property accountability training. Officers need to understand how and why they should sub-hand receipt all equipment, basic issue items, components of end items, and technical manuals down to the squad- and team-leader levels.

Lieutenants need to understand required maintenance documentation, what it means to have a vehicle at 10/20 standard, and what documents and processes are required to conduct a lateral transfer from one unit identification code to another.

In a training environment, it would be highly beneficial for the schoolhouse to develop a mock supply room with a hand receipt. This would provide junior officers with practice going through an inventory and looking up national stock num-

bers and serial numbers. In this way, the junior officers would gain an understanding of how the information appears within line item and sub-line item numbers.

This training would be valuable for new officers during BOLC because it would make the process less foreign to them when they arrive at

their first units.

Additionally, at each new duty station, junior officers should receive an in-processing presentation to learn what resources are available on the post for property accountability. During this presentation they could ask technical questions about Property Book Unit Supply Enhanced and other Army property management tools.

Company commanders need to be better trained on how to teach their platoon leaders and executive officers about property accountability. The end result will be less pressure on leaders because they will be trained and have more time available to train their Soldiers to be better stewards of Army property.

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