

The Bureaucratic Bind:

How Current Administrative Requirements Hinder Warfighting

By Captain Brent M. Stout

With a larger number of “additional” duty requirements than people available to fulfill them, more than 3 dozen monthly reports to complete, nearly 100 published policies to obey, 50 directed operating procedures to follow, ever-increasing annual training requirements to satisfy, dozens of leader and Soldier certification programs to attend, and more than 300 personnel programs to implement, U.S. Army companies struggle to clear the hurdles in the way of accomplishing their top priority: warfighting.

Additional Duties

Approximately 75 additional duties are required of all Army companies, and unit commanders must assign two or more junior leaders to each duty. Assigned individuals must attend schools, participate in online training, undergo regular inspections, and create and maintain continuity binders and knowledge management systems. With this demand, companies need help finding the personnel and time necessary to handle administrative and clerical burdens while also training on warfighting tasks. While critical company functions must be fulfilled, each additional duty pulls squad leaders away from their squads and platoon leaders away from their platoons. Key leaders at the company level are stuck behind computers for most of their workdays and many days off, just trying to keep up.

Some of the most commonly known additional duties required of all companies across the Army include unit armorer, master driver, equal opportunity leader, and sexual harassment and assault victim advocate. These and other duties, such as communications security custodian, government purchase card holder, unit movement officer, and hazardous material endorsement officer, require extended specialized training, which is often held at the corps or installation level. Training and certifying a communications security custodian or government purchase card holder only to have them move to another assignment in a few months is not uncommon. Companies and even battalions must often rely on adjacent units or find ways to make do for several months, until they have their own personnel trained and certified in these vital roles.

Reporting Requirements

Apart from additional duties, companies across the Army are commonly required to submit anywhere from 3 to 4 dozen monthly reports, each requiring information gathering, preparation, review, validation, processing, submission,

and storage. Completing and submitting reports can tie up the equivalent of 1 week every month for company command teams, with most reports being redundant or otherwise unnecessary. For example, the unit commander’s financial report could be consolidated with the basic allowance for housing validation report and the basic needs analysis report. Other reports that could be consolidated into a single report include the unit manning report, rating scheme, alert roster, readiness roster, and Soldier and Family readiness group roster. Burdensome reports such as the troops to task report rarely provide input for actual decisions, processes, or systems; instead, they require many hours to complete every week, and they pull platoon sergeants and operations sergeants away from warfighting operations and missions. If leaders (specifically, commanders at echelon) do not understand all that is being asked of their reporting subordinates, it is easy to add yet another report, PowerPoint® slide, or meeting.

Policies and Operating Procedures

A quick scan of the Army Publishing Directorate website indicates that there are roughly 15,000 active Army regulations, directives, general orders, all-Army activities messages, technical manuals and bulletins, Army doctrine publications, field manuals, and training circulars—many of which Army leaders are expected to understand, reference, and enforce. At the unit level, commanders are expected to publish and display their own policy letters as well as the policy letters of higher echelons. Regardless of how easy it might be to copy and modify 1 or 2 dozen policy letters from the higher echelon, a lot of time is required to find, reference, update, understand, disseminate, display, and apply the abundance of policy letters and periodic updates from the company, battalion, brigade, division, corps, command, and Department of the Army.

Like unit commander policy letters, standard operating procedures (SOPs) specify how a unit will operate in its current structure under the current command. SOPs are meant to increase unit effectiveness by standardizing and streamlining operations. Army companies typically have anywhere from 12 to 20 operating procedures, with the tactical SOP, plans SOP, command post SOP, and maintenance SOP at the forefront. Other SOPs include the arms rooms, safety, supply, communications, medical, barracks, and motor pool SOPs. Unit SOPs are inspected at least annually, with some SOPs, like the maintenance SOP, reaching hundreds of pages in length. The large volume of documents that need

to be updated, inspected, and quickly referenced inundates and overwhelms company leaders and diminishes the effectiveness of operating procedures.

Training Requirements and Certification Programs

The current suite of annual training requirements includes the Threat Awareness and Reporting Program, Antiterrorism, Survival Evasion Resistance and Escape Education, Isolated Personnel Report, Cyberawareness, Network Acceptable Use Policy, Safeguarding Personally Identifiable Information, Leader's Safety Course, Family Advocacy Program, Global Assessment Tool Azimuth Check, Digital Training Management System Leader Certification, Personnel Readiness, installation People First Programs, Leader Medical Protection System, Equal Opportunity, and Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention, among others. These recurrent training requirements foster an ethically faded environment in which people are tempted to skip through the training on mute or even forge certificates of completion. Most of the required training arguably offers little or no value to Army leaders and does not directly contribute to more-prepared formations or better warfighting.

In-house leader academy and certification programs are prevalent at battalion and brigade echelons across the Army—usually in the form of squad leader, platoon sergeant, platoon leader, executive officer, and command team certifications. Army installations host consolidated courses for company and battalion executive officers with emphasis placed on the precommand course for incoming company commanders and first sergeants. The intent behind internal leader certification programs to prepare incoming leaders for their positions through information dissemination and program familiarization is honorable. The return on investments in in-house leader academies and certification programs can be high—especially with significant chain-of-command engagement and group reviews of current events and Army initiatives. Regardless, these activities still fill slots on training calendars and pull leaders away from their companies—and only marginally lead to better warfighting.

Daily Administrative Requirements

The aforementioned additional duties, required reports, policies, procedures, training requirements, and certification programs do not account for all the other daily company administrative functions and responsibilities. The largest source of administrative requirements involves personnel items such as awards, evaluations, counseling, leave processing, professional development events, physical fitness testing, height and weight testing, urinalysis testing, bars to reenlistment, Uniform Code Of Military Justice actions, signature cards, medical readiness compliance, career skills and transition assistance programs, substance use disorder clinical care, Family care plans, personnel flags, high-risk reviews, health and welfare inspections, Army Good Conduct Medals, promotions, reenlistments, motorcycle counseling, and privately owned weapon validation and approvals.

Additional administrative responsibilities of the commander include reviewing training plans; creating and briefing operations orders; developing commander's inquiries; adjudicating legal actions; attending higher-echelon events such as professional development sessions and hail and farewell gatherings; accounting for property through cyclic inventories and reconciliation; and updating slides for company, battalion, and brigade meetings. There is little wonder that modern-day company commanders are primarily concerned with garrison administrative operations rather than warfighting.

The sheer number of duties, reports, policies, procedures, requirements, and programs results from fragmenting and bureaucratizing company functions to reduce risk and institutionalize consistency and redundancy at echelon. Army-wide installation and program managers and individual staff sections are quick to add additional requirements and inspections because they view their functions as independent from other company priorities, lines of effort, and training requirements. Many required additional duties such as master fitness trainer, master driver, master resiliency trainer, master marksmanship trainer, retention officer, dispatching delegate, fuel handler, and unit movement officer are components of organic duties already held by company junior leaders. For other duties associated with Army-wide systems of record such as Digital Training Management System operator, Defense Travel System operator, Global Combat Support System—Army operator, Army Records Information Management System manager, and publications officer, personnel are assigned to absorb the administrative burden. Formally institutionalizing these lines of effort creates consistency across the vast Army formation—but at the expense of adding inspections and continuity binders, filling up training calendars and, possibly, hiring and maintaining installation civilian program managers. The repercussions of possibly cutting duties like voting assistance officer; repair and utility representative; motorcycle mentor; Family, Morale, Welfare, and Recreation coordinator, fire marshall, container control officer, or credentialing assistance officer are unknown. But if everything is a priority, then nothing is a priority.

Warfighting Priority

At the April 2024 Joint General Officer Forum, held in Tampa, Florida, General Randy A. George reiterated that the number one Army priority is warfighting, stating that retaining this focus would require a culture shift away from bureaucracy and toward continuous innovation.¹ He went on to say that there is interplay between leadership and risk taking and that each additional duty, policy, report, and operating procedure is a response to a previously identified issue; therefore, strong leaders willing to take risks will be needed in order to reduce the redundant and unnecessary requirements currently distracting companies from warfighting.² As General George states, "We won't change things without being very knowledgeable about them."³ Leaders at echelon will need to understand the full volume of what is being asked of companies before they can direct

change—and not just what is listed in a battalion weekly tasking order, but everything demanded from the Army, installation programs, and other external entities.

Enforced Efforts

Lieutenant General Sean C. Bernabe, previous commanding general, III Armored Corps, Fort Cavazos, Texas, took note of the expectations placed on company leaders and began considering ways to revamp the Fort Cavazos Company Commander and First Sergeant Courses to realign company priorities and reduce administrative requirements.⁴ Reducing requirements and duties is difficult, as it increases risk. Certain tasks—especially those that are tied to other unit lines of effort, those that are bureaucratically convoluted, or those that are tied to unit or leader metrics of success and performance—must continue to be performed. The Chief of Staff of the Army could tell a company commander to stop inputting data into the Army's Digital Training Management System if it doesn't help the company improve warfighting; still, if that commander's battalion and brigade use that data to track training completion and assess training schedule compliance, the input is going to continue.

In September 2023, personnel from the U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) Office of the Inspector General conducted an inspection of FORSCOM units spanning nine installations and including 109 companies of 46 battalions from 26 brigades.⁵ The objective of the inspection was to identify primary sources of schedule disruption and inefficiency and assess leader engagement at echelon to implement directives and initiatives from higher headquarters. The inspectors concluded that poor staff work and a lack of communication between echelons prevented commanders from providing the predictable training environments outlined in Army Regulation (AR) 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development*,⁶ and Field Manual (FM) 7.0, *Training*.⁷ They found that, in order to complete administrative tasks, company leaders continued to work hours after releasing their Soldiers and that the unpredictability at echelons of battalion and below was the result of the regular publication of taskings with lead times well short of the doctrinal timelines. The inspection revealed that companies sometimes receive taskings within an hour of execution—and even after directed suspense timelines. (Even small tasks can tie up key leaders and equipment.) The inspection should have identified programs and lines of effort that distract units from their priority warfighting missions and pull them away from complying with their training plans and calendars; however, it did not. It is recommended that additional inspections be conducted to identify redundant Army programs that could be cut or offer recommendations for reducing or eliminating any Army directives or initiatives.

Conclusion

We must recognize the impact on time and materiel resources imposed by excessive administrative requirements. We can reduce these impacts by changing requirements at higher echelons and through selective focus and

leader and manager competencies at lower echelons. If the Army wants to modernize and focus on improving its warfighting capabilities, then the bureaucracy must be reduced by scaling back the Army-wide directives, initiatives, and programs and decreasing administrative and clerical requirements and responsibilities at the company level. Since information requirements are directed from higher headquarters, any course corrections or systemic changes can only occur from the top down.

Warfighting has been placed on the back burner, behind the deluge of required company administrative actions, trainings, and programs. Senior leaders must take a step back to fully grasp the breadth of company functions and the scope of required tasks demanded of company leaders and decide when, where, and how to reduce them. Placing warfighting back at the forefront will require that leaders take risks through drastic cutbacks in current administrative priorities from all Army entities. When there are more additional duty requirements than people available to fulfill them, it's time to determine where cuts can be made.

Endnotes:

¹Joint General Officer Forum, FORSCOM, Tampa, Florida, 23–24 April 2024.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴III Armored Corps tasker to 1st Cavalry Division staff, 9 April 2024.

⁵FORSCOM Inspector General Report, *Day in the Life Follow-Up Inspection*, May–September 2023, 13 December 2023.

⁶AR 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development*, 10 December 2017.

⁷FM 7.0, *Training*, 14 June 2021.

Captain Stout recently completed an assignment as the commander of the 104th Engineer Construction Company, Fort Cavazos. He earned an undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering from the U.S. Military Academy—West Point, New York, and a master's degree in engineering management from Missouri University of Science and Technology at Rolla. Captain Stout is currently enrolled in advanced civil schooling for nuclear engineering at Texas A&M, College Station, and will follow that with a teaching assignment in the Department of Physics and Nuclear Engineering at the U.S. Military Academy beginning in the fall of 2026.