

Transforming the Traditional Guard Routine

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Switching the National Guard duty schedule to one week every three months (quarterly) presents numerous advantages that can address training effectiveness and personal balance for Guard members. Currently, the traditional weekend drill schedule often results in inefficiencies. Imagine, if you will, the current setup: a National Guard member, let's call him Sergeant Joe, rushes through his regular workweek at his civilian job, only to trade in his much-needed weekend relaxation for a drill. Picture Joe frantically closing deals on Friday evening, only to hit the sack early because he has to report for drill at 0700 hours on Saturday. He arrives at the armory, bleary-eyed, ready for action. But, alas, his first task? Administrative catch-up. Yes, Joe spends the morning filling out paperwork, updating personal records, and attending mandatory briefings. By the time Joe properly reacquaints himself with the mountain of bureaucracy, it's almost noon.

Now, Joe finally gets to do what he signed up for—training. But wait, it's only a refresher course on basic skills he's already done a dozen times because it's another box we must check. The afternoon is a blur of repetitive drills that feel like time fillers while senior leadership catches up on CUBs, BUBs, training meetings, safety council, decision briefs, and staff syncs; it's time to call it a day. Sunday rolls around, and the cycle begins anew. By the time Joe gets into the swing of things, it's time to pack up and head home. Monday morning looms, bringing another civilian workweek and little to show for his weekend.

Now, let's imagine an alternative scenario with a quarterly drill schedule. Instead of the hectic, fragmented weekend drills, Joe has an entire week dedicated to training every three months. He arrives on base, ready to dive deep into comprehensive, uninterrupted training. Picture Joe and his unit engaged in complex, scenario-based exercises that build on each other day by day. By midweek, they're operating at peak efficiency, running simulations that mimic real-world missions, honing their skills in a way that weekend drills could never allow. The difference is night and day—like trying to read a novel five minutes at a time versus binge-reading it over a lazy Sunday afternoon.

The current weekend drill schedule often results in fragmented and superficial training experiences. National Guard members spend considerable time reacquainting themselves with systems and paperwork, leaving limited time for in-depth training. In contrast, extended, uninterrupted training periods of one week every three months allow for more comprehensive and immersive training. The idea of an extended training period benefits Joe and the entire unit. This setup enhances readiness and operational effectiveness, as units can engage in more complex exercises and scenario-based training without the constant interruptions that shorter drills bring. Research by the Army Training Network emphasizes that uninterrupted training time supports adopting modern training technologies and methodologies, ensuring that units remain at the forefront of military capabilities (Army Training Network, 2020). Units like the 165th Airlift Wing have reported increased efficiency and productivity after shifting to extended drills, noting that members could complete tasks more thoroughly without the constant breaks typical of weekend drills (Ross, 2022).

More extended training periods reduce the time and money spent on travel and setup, often eating into the valuable training hours of shorter weekend drills. Instead of spending hours driving to the armory, setting up, and re-familiarizing themselves with the systems, Guard members can dive straight into meaningful, uninterrupted training sessions. The National Guard Bureau has highlighted the efficiency gains from extended training periods, allowing

units to complete tasks more thoroughly and effectively (National Guard Bureau, 2021). From an operational perspective, aligning training schedules with the availability of higher headquarters and supporting elements, which typically operate on standard weekday schedules, can lead to more comprehensive and realistic training exercises. This alignment ensures all necessary support elements are available, bridging communication gaps and allowing for more integrated and practical training sessions (Knight, 2023). The proposed quarterly schedule also addresses morale and retention issues. The traditional weekend drills often conflict with soldiers' civilian commitments, creating stress and reducing overall job satisfaction. A CPT Knight (2023) study found that flexible training schedules positively impact soldiers' morale and retention rates. By implementing a more predictable and less frequent drill schedule, soldiers can better balance their military and civilian lives, leading to higher job satisfaction and retention rates. Additionally, reducing the frequency of drills alleviates the burden of unpaid hours spent on military duties, contributing to higher morale and job satisfaction (Knight, 2023; Aragon, 2024). The shift to a quarterly drill schedule is like upgrading from a clunky old typewriter to a sleek, efficient laptop. It offers a smoother, more effective way to handle the necessary tasks while providing substantial benefits in training depth and personal balance. With enhanced communication, flexible scheduling, and robust support systems, this new approach can balance military obligations and civilian careers, ensuring that our National Guard remains ready and resilient.

References

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