

Running head: FRAUD, WASTE, AND ABUSE IN THE ARMY'S LOGISTICAL

Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in the Army's Logistical Field

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Abstract

A lack of leadership involvement in the military's logistical arena has caused numerous unnecessary problems. The lack of leader involvement prevents the enforcement of procedures and regulations that deter the misappropriation of military equipment, supplies, and parts. Unfortunately unit morale and readiness decrease, and unknown amounts of money and man hours are wasted. Affects do not stop at the unit or military as a whole for that matter. Taxpayers and displaced civilians on the battle field are just a couple of examples of those who pay the price in the long run. Proper supervision and training has fallen partially due to today's high operational tempo.

Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in the Army's Logistical Field

A serious ethical dilemma in today's army is one that runs rampant in the logistical arena of the military. We have all heard of incidents where an organization ordered some supplies through the army supply system and their property supposedly never showed up or disappeared. The paper work trail led it to the local Supply Support Activity (SSA) but no one seems to know what happened to it. Days later you see your supplies being used by another person or hear from someone that they saw someone get it out of your box at the SSA. I know I have been in this scenario numerous times. A lack of leadership and supervision in the logistical arena has spurred an influx of misappropriation (theft) by not only the personnel responsible for the proper distribution of supplies, but by many other entities as well. Some of these entities may be young Soldiers, military leaders and civilians. I have seen where a unit had ordered laptop computers for their unit and when they arrived, there were some missing. When asked where they were, the NCOIC of the SSA just shrugged his shoulders and said it happens all the time. That answer is totally unsatisfactory and proves the fact that some leaders are not performing their duties. Not only does this type of unethical behavior hinder the mission by preventing needed supplies from reaching their intended location, but it also dramatically affects unit morale.

Affects on Unit Morale

Misappropriation has a profound effect on numerous aspects of the army to include the unit's morale. When Soldiers see other unit's or Soldiers that have more or better equipment and supplies they tend to blame their chain of command. The appearance of an uncaring or incompetent leader can adversely affect the unit's morale. Also, word travels fast in the military. If someone is caught taking another unit's property it will breed dissension among units. This dissension will cause undue stressors between organizations that need to work closely together.

By not properly addressing these issues with your Soldiers and all who have a roll in the problem, morale suffers. If a leader allows this type of action to go unchecked, the meaning of the Army Values tends to lose its meaning. I know that if my leaders allow this unfair and illegal behavior to go uncorrected, I would think that my leaders were not living by the values that the Army set forth and may wonder why I should have to abide by them. Lastly, when an issue such as this goes without correction, a “tit for tat” attitude arises. “If they can do it and get away with it, so can I.” This attitude can have numerous negative outcomes on not only the morale, but the mission as well.

Affects on Unit Readiness

Morale can have a detrimental effect on the unit’s readiness. As previously discussed dissention among not only leaders and Soldiers, but also between units that need to work together will negatively affect the timely accomplishment of the mission. Unit readiness depends upon the receipt of required equipment, parts, and supplies. In most theatres of operation there are usually numerous different units with a similar mission. Let’s say a forward support company in a transportation unit. They all have a motor pool that has a primary mission of repairing vehicles. When a part is ordered to return a vehicle to a fully mission capable status, a motor sergeant should not have to worry about some other unit getting that part. Unfortunately this occurs all too often. There are tracking mechanisms in place to track these parts on order, but if proper supervisory techniques are not put in place to ensure the parts do not get lost or stolen, the part can disappear without a trace. I have heard of numerous cases where an SSA has a box in a warehouse that is labeled for each unit. The parts, supplies, or equipment is placed in these boxes until the unit arrives to sign for it. The problem is that many of these warehouses are open for all to peruse. There are no measures in place to prevent someone from looking in my

unit's box and taking whatever they want and walk right out without anyone questioning them. Not all SSAs have such a poor process, but unfortunately some do and it only takes one to prevent that needed part from reaching that unit that needs it in order to fix the only up armored vehicle it has. Meanwhile they are forced to use a soft skin vehicle to travel on IED infested roads.

Lack of Required Equipment

The lack of required equipment has far reaching affects. Not only does it affect the Soldiers and leaders in the units, but it affects the people that we support as a military force. What if that part was needed to fix a CH-47 helicopter that was to be used to deliver much needed water and food to displaced civilians on the battlefield? That part now needs to be reordered which adds time that those civilians may not have. What if those survival knives were to be issued to Soldiers driving on convoys to cut their seat belts in case of a roll over and they did not receive them because someone decided to steal them to give to their family as gifts? Parts, equipment, and supplies are extremely expensive. Who pays for all of these lost or stolen items in our supply system? Taxpayers like you, me, and our families pay for this unnecessary misappropriation.

Techniques for Countering Fraud, Waste, and Abuse

Fraud, waste, and abuse have been around the army since the army's beginning. During the Civil War the suppliers were to blame for numerous counts of fraud because of greed. For example, suppliers would send rations that were only half full to the troops in the field. Today is no different and numerous different techniques have been implemented to try and counter this problem. Two recent courses of action are the involvement of the U.S. Army's Criminal Investigation Division (CID) and the introduction of some new technology. Although the

success of these new attempts will also be based on the Soldiers and leaders at the helm, at least there is a renewed effort to stop the fraud. CID has recently been involved in some new training that will assist them in identifying and investigating forms of fraud within the Army's logistics realm. This training is in its infancy but will soon expand from its current Korea based program to an army wide program. They are training directly with logistical experts both active and retired military to learn about the logistical process and the technology that is used to track items from the manufacturer to the end user. The newest technology to be introduced is what is called in transit visibility (ITV). Basically an electronic tag is placed on the item at its origin which allows accurate tracking of the item via satellite all the way to its intended destination. This technology has been in use for years in the civilian logistics realm. The United Postal Service (UPS) uses it with surprising effectiveness. The ITV system is an awesome method of tracking, but will not prevent theft. The tag can easily be removed. Hopefully this new system is a deterrent and helps prevent some of the fraud.

Why does this happen and how can it be fixed?

Why does this happen and how can it be fixed? The answer to this question should be simple. I believe the "why?" can be explained by greed, poor planning, and a lack of discipline on the part of some Soldiers and leaders. How can it be fixed? Leaders need to merely do their jobs. By properly supervising and enforcing the procedures and regulations already put in place, many wasted man hours and dollars would be saved. This savings could be better spent on taking care of our Soldiers and their families. It appears that a lack of training in this area, most likely due to the high operational tempo mission of the ongoing war against terror, could be another reason for the problem. Checks and balances must be put in place to ensure the logistical channels are functioning as designed. Leaders and Soldiers need to be held accountable for their

actions or lack of actions. This ethical dilemma is far more in-depth than just the Army's SSAs though.

In conclusion, Soldiers of today will continue these bad habits in the future if the military does not take the appropriate measures needed to stop the ongoing fraud, waste, and abuse. I do not believe the government has a grasp on the depth of this issue or more emphasis would have been put on it already. With the military in full stride and no end in sight, we stand to lose millions of unneeded dollars due to a mere lack of adequate supervision.

Reference

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