

Running Head: Senior Leader Responsibility and Accountability

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The Global War on Terror eroded the discipline of Army Leaders management of unit budgets and accountability of their equipment. In the Army, we call this fraud, waste, and abuse. All leaders in the military have the responsibility to manage their funds, supplies, and account for their equipment.

To support the GWOT, our legislative and executive branches consistently increased the defense budget to support our war fighting effort. The senior military leadership pushed GWOT funding and rushed new equipment down to the lowest levels of leadership entrusting them with the responsibility and accountability of using the money and equipment to support the Soldier. The senior leadership did this because they had an obligation to the Soldier and knew they must provide them with the necessary equipment and supplies to fight and win on the battlefield.

Fraud, Waste, and Abuse of Unit Budgets

My first area of concern is how leaders mismanage their unit budgets under the premise of supporting the GWOT. These leaders abuse GWOT dollars by overinflating budgets, requesting dream items, or even purchasing equipment and supplies for their personal use. During the beginning of the GWOT, money flowed to a small group of Special Operations Forces and Conventional Units. As with the start of US involvement in our other wars, these Soldiers lacked some of the basic essentials and technical gear required to complete their missions. The leaders of the units established liberal guidance, in most instances, concerning the purchase of equipment and supplies without placing an adequate checks and balance system to account for most of these new items. Most senior leaders felt if these Soldiers requested the items they must need it for combat. In most cases, this was and is true; however, it takes only one Soldier out there to abuse the system.

As the Army continued to fight the GWOT in Afghanistan throughout 2002, there was a growing call for removal of Saddam Hussein from Iraq. Once again, the scenario noted above played out only this time it involved an even larger force. In addition, the Army used some of the same units involved in the initial deployments to Afghanistan. These units had little recovery time from their first deployments, which meant they did not complete their inventories or only spot-checked equipment. The defense budget mushroomed between 2003-2004, as forces moved into Iraq. The military leaders called for this increased funding because of this new front in the GWOT. This infusion of more money meant the leaders and Soldier kept spending it with little restraint or oversight on their purchases. Much of the equipment purchased was off the shelf type items which ranged anywhere from Gateway laptops and HP printers to Oakley Sunglasses and Sunto Watches to Northface Jackets and Merrill Boots. Some of the Soldiers in these Army units required this type of specialized equipment. Nevertheless, a majority of them did not.

Fighting a war on two fronts kept most Army units in a perpetual state of a deployment/redeployment cycle with a small window for refit. These units established a Statement of Requirements (SOR) procedure to assist them with consolidating their supply and equipment requests. They called these the deployment SOR (DSOR) and the Post Deployment SOR. This procedure established some order to budgeting and accountability within a unit. However, the accountability practices established at the beginning of OEF and OIF eroded the discipline and integrity of some units. This meant the leaders and Soldiers in those units continued their fraud, waste, and abuse of unit funds. Some chose to ignore their responsibility and others simply did not know the standards because no one showed them the correct way to do it.

Improper Equipment Accountability

My second area of concern is the waste and abuse I observed in two units concerning their improper accountability of equipment. I transitioned between two Special Operations units over the past four years and encountered poor equipment maintenance and accountability practices at both of them. Once again, these units rotated between OEF and OIF and fell into the deployment- redeployment cycle with a small window for refit. The unit leaders at both locations were grossly negligent in their duties to properly maintain and account for their equipment.

I made it to the first unit in 2003 and immediately deployed to Afghanistan. After returning from Afghanistan, I discovered a huge mess with accountability procedures of assigned equipment. This problem appeared systemic throughout the unit and not just confined to one section. The Company Commander, First Sergeant, and all other section leaders blamed their accountability issues on their deployment cycle, which did not permit them enough time to conduct inventories, repair equipment, or get rid of excess items. They had ISU-90s and connexes full of items not placed on the property books. Other items on the property books were lost, stolen, or never found. These items consisted of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, Plasma TVs, Laptop Computers, Printers, and many other high dollar items. The system to fix all this seemed to be one of trying to write it off as a combat loss or using the good ole boy network to square away a *buddy*. Eventually, a change of command occurred and the new commander spent countless days and long hours fixing the problems and enforcing proper accountability standards. The gross negligence by the previous commander cost the government thousands of dollars.

Then, I transferred to the second unit in 2005. I came into this unit expecting the leadership to have more discipline and no problems with enforcing standards. However, the same problem I encountered in the first unit smashed me in the face at this one. Once again, the Company

Commander and First Sergeant did not enforce proper maintenance and accountability standards. I noted the accountability issue appeared systemic throughout the unit. Unlike the previous unit, this one had the luxury of keeping their First Sergeant or Commander at home station and still were not disciplined enough to account for their equipment. Their idea of securing the equipment was throwing it *all* together down the basement. They mixed equipment together from multiple hand receipts and all soldiers had access to the location. If you required a piece of equipment for training or deployment, you just went down to the basement and picked it up. There was no hand receipt or other method used to account for it. Once again, a change in leadership cleaned up the accountability mess and enforced proper accounting procedures.

Conclusion

After witnessing these two examples of negligent accountability, I find it hard to believe other units in the Army have not experienced the same type of fraud, waste, and abuse. I can rationalize running into one unit with this type of problem, but finding two of them within a short time span leads me to believe there are others with the same problems. Our leaders taught us through the Army Values and NCOES system to enforce standards and set the example for our Soldiers. We cannot continue to neglect our basic duties as a senior NCO, which is accountability. Abusing our unit funds and not accounting for our equipment erodes discipline in our units and contributes to fraud, waste, and abuse in the Army.