

The Change of Command Inventory: Planning for Success

The author offers guidelines to help make the often painful process of conducting a change of command inventory less stressful for an outgoing company commander.

by Major Richard J. Hornstein

Commanding a company was, without a doubt, the most challenging and rewarding job I have had in the Army thus far, but it also was very stressful. One of the primary stresses was property management. Managing the property of a large maintenance company was extremely time consuming and difficult. The previous two commanders of my company had large reports of survey initiated against them following their change of command (COC) inventories, and they lost pay because of the property losses. This happens too often, and COC inventories that result in a report of survey with findings against the commander affect not only his wallet but also his officer evaluation report. Few senior raters consider lack of property accountability an attribute of an above-average commander. The COC inventory is the outgoing commander's responsibility, and how well he plans for this event can help ensure its success.

Preparation

The following tips can help a future company commander prepare adequately for the tough job of conducting a COC inventory.

Seek an in-brief with the battalion commander before beginning the inventory. The battalion commander should provide comprehensive guidance to the incoming and outgoing company commanders. The information can be provided in a memorandum that is distributed to both commanders. It should be followed up with a meeting to discuss and review the guidance, the schedule, and any other issues or questions the company commanders may raise. My battalion commander did this, and it provided a professional atmosphere and demonstrated that the inventory was also a priority of the battalion's senior officer. He also required both the incoming and outgoing commanders to brief him daily on the progress of the inventory and on any problems that may have surfaced that he could help with.

Publish the inventory schedule. The sub-hand receipt holders should know well in advance that the COC inventory is looming, so it should come as no surprise to them. A schedule identifying the time, the place, and the responsible parties needs to be published before the inventory so that all the people involved are adequately prepared. While in command, you should hold monthly hand receipt meetings to disseminate information and resolve property issues. Use these meetings to deconflict sub-hand receipt holders' schedules for the COC inventory and resolve any additional issues.

Conduct a pre-COC inventory. The outgoing commander must conduct a pre-COC inventory if he wants a successful COC inventory. Conducting a full pre-COC inventory may not always be feasible, depending on the amount of property, the training schedule, and the time needed to conduct a thorough

inventory. However, at the very minimum, every nonexpendable item needs to be accounted for. A nonexpendable shortage mandates a report of survey unless the item is recovered, so ensure that these articles are on hand. All sub-hand receipt holders should update their shortage annexes and re-sign their hand receipts before the actual COC inventory. If nonexpendable shortages are identified during the pre-CEC inventory, initiate any reports of survey required.

The purpose of the pre-COC inventory is to make administrative corrections to the property book and identify and resolve possible problems before the actual COC inventory. Conducting the pre-COC inventory also protects the sub-hand receipt holders. The outgoing commander has the opportunity to resolve shortfalls and realign any excess property available within the company to protect the sub-hand receipt holders from possible monetary losses. While you are the company commander, ensure that every item on the company's property book is sub-hand receipted. Your signature should be on only the master hand receipt. The supply sergeant should sign for all additional property that comes in during the incoming and outgoing COC inventories and subsequently issue it to the appropriate shop or section hand receipt holder.

Make the supply sergeant available. The supply sergeant's focus in life should be the upcoming inventory. Its success is a direct reflection of how well he has done his job. He should ensure that all shortages are on order, and he should have a valid document or order number for them on record and annotated on the associated shortage annexes.

The Internet provides a great resource for supply catalogs, so there should be no excuse for any missing supply catalogs during the inventory. Charge your supply sergeant and supply officer with maintaining visibility of updated supply catalogs. To preclude discrepancies in future inventories, ensure that the date of the catalog is indicated on the sub-hand receipts.

Involve unit lieutenants at every level. Appoint your executive officer or another responsible individual to be your supply officer and oversee supply operations. Have this individual report directly to you daily to keep you updated on all property issues. Also, use your platoon leaders to prepare for the inventory. Have them participate in the monthly inventories and the pre-COC inventory. Involve them in the platoon's property management, and use their support forms to tie their success to their platoon's property. This both increases their awareness of a critical leadership task and increases supervisory accountability of the company's property.

Have warrant officers sign for property when possible. Noncommissioned officers (NCOs) are quite capable of signing for property; however, in a supply or maintenance company, the NCOs turn over more often than the warrant officers do. Warrant officers also become much more concerned with property when they have signed for it. They also have more experience with the property. For example, the warrants are often more familiar with the unique tools that are included in the shop sets, kits, and outfits than the NCOs. They, in turn, can sub-hand receipt their property down to the user level and tie their NCOs' performance in managing property accountability to the NCO evaluation reports.

Conducting the COC Inventory

Adhering to a plan is the key to the inventory's success. This often requires the supply room personnel, supply officer, and all sub-hand receipt holders to work some extra hours in order to stay on track during the inventory. The additional hours usually stem from ensuring that the sub-hand receipts for property inventoried during the day are adequately updated and re-signed before concluding for the day. However, the actual physical count should be completed during duty hours.

Draft and sign statements of charges for durable and expendable unresolved shortages. Always keep a running tally of the total cost of losses identified. Keep the battalion commander aware of the inventory's progress and of any losses—especially high-cost and nonexpendable losses. Remember that a nonexpendable loss will always require a report of survey and cannot be accounted for unless the property book officer (PBO) has signed a shortage annex for the commander identifying the loss.

A close relationship with the PBO is important for any commander. This relationship should be established as soon as possible. The incoming company commander should visit the PBO before conducting the COC inventory. He should ask the PBO about the status of property in the company and any previously identified long-standing issues of accountability or excess property.

The outgoing and incoming commanders who follow these procedures to prepare for and execute a COC inventory will enjoy greater success. Following this guidance will reduce their stress and streamline the overall inventory process. COC inventories in most supply and maintenance companies are grueling, tedious, and time consuming. They also are the first impression that the incoming commander will get of the company and its leadership. While you are a company commander, involve the chain of command within the company in property accountability and always stress its importance at every level.

Safeguarding the property of the Army is serious business. The commander cannot shoulder the burden of property accountability alone. Commanders who feel that they can accomplish this mission singlehandedly frequently fail and suffer large reports of survey at the conclusion of their commands. This capstone event in a company command is important, and it is frequently a deciding factor in how the officer's performance will reflect on his evaluation. **ALOG**

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