REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

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1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)* 03-05-2010	2. REPORT TYPE FINAL		3. DATES COVERED *(From - To)*	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Eliminating Mission Distracters – Bridging the Gap in Essential Personnel Support for Individual Augmentees			**5a. CONTRACT NUMBER**	
			5b. GRANT NUMBER	
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) PISTONE, REGINA, MAJ, USA			**5d. PROJECT NUMBER**	
			5e. TASK NUMBER	
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Joint Military Operations Department Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207			**8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER**	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			**10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)**	
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	

12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES:
A paper submitted to the Naval War College faculty in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.

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This paper examines the pre-deployment process and the level of support that exists in theater for the Army, Air Force and Navy. It also identifies the range of services provided and the different automated systems used. Lastly, the paper draws conclusions on the current system that prepares IAs for through the entire deployment. It recommends changes to implement a standard validation process to better prepare and support IAs through the entire deployment.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
Personnel Support; Individual Augmentee

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Chairman, JMO Department
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	**b. ABSTRACT** UNCLASSIFIED	**c. THIS PAGE** UNCLASSIFIED		29	**19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER** *(include area code)* 401-841-3414

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.

Eliminating Mission Distracters - Bridging the Gap in Essential Personnel Support for Individual Augmentees

by

Regina Pistone

Major, USA

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

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Signature: _____

3 May 2010

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Abstract

Eliminating Mission Distracters - Bridging the Gap in Essential Personnel Support for Individual Augmentees

Individual augmentees are filling critical joint billets in the Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility. Integrating these individual deployers into a unit or staff and making them feel as part of the team is paramount in a deployed environment. Taking care of these Airman, Sailors and Marines includes preparing them to deploy and providing them essential personnel support in theater while they are part of an Army-centric team. Eliminating mission distracters caused by unresolved personnel issues will result in a high level of moral and a high operating strength.

This paper examines the pre-deployment process and the level of support that exists in theater for the Army, Air Force and Navy. It also identifies the range of services provided and the different automated systems used. Lastly, the paper draws conclusions on the current system that prepares IAs for through the entire deployment. It recommends changes to implement a standard validation process to better prepare and support IAs through the entire deployment.

Introduction

A considerable percentage of the forces in the Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility are individual augmentees (IA).[1] IAs represent personnel from across the service components tasked by the Joint Staff to fill critical joint manning document positions.[2] These individuals may fill key positions or possess critical skill sets essential to the mission.[3] Integrating these individual deployers into a unit or staff and making them feel as part of the team is paramount in a deployed environment.[4] Taking care of these Airman, Sailors and Marines includes providing essential personnel support in theater while they are part of an Army-centric team.

The most important resource the joint forces commander has in his arsenal to execute the mission are his forces – his people.[5] IAs and their families must cope with a tremendous amount of stress caused by the separation of deployments.[6] Unresolved personnel and/or finance issues only add to this stress. This additional stress can adversely affect the IA and his/her family but also affect the IA's performance.[7] Providing essential personnel support is even more important for IAs because they did not deploy with their parent commands.[8] Parent commands should prepare their IAs for deployment to the highest extent possible through a rigorous validation process. Essential personnel support does exist in theater to resolve any personnel issues that the validation process missed. The personnel support has its drawbacks due to its automated systems.

To better prepare IAs for deployment and provide them the best essential personnel support, the joint forces commander must improve the validation process to increase the operational readiness of his forces. The goal for providing the highest level of personnel

support is to maximize the commander's operating strength of his forces in theater.[9] Essential personnel support is vital to the overall morale of the joint force and reduces mission distracters.[10]

Discussion and Analysis

The need for tailored personnel support in theater exists for IAs because the Joint Staff tasks the other service components to fill requirements that the Army cannot.[11] Although the IAs are going to Army staffs, the Air Force and the Navy still "retain authority for personnel support to their forces assigned or attached to joint commands…."[12] The "responsibility for providing personnel support to their forces"[13] lies with the tasked service components. The service components have the autonomy to provide support that best suits their core competencies. The Army, the Air Force and the Navy all provide personnel support when preparing their IAs for deployment but in varying levels of quality because there is no set standard. Tailored personnel support is crucial to the "operational readiness and, when executed properly, becomes a combat multiplier for the joint force."[14]

The Army, Air Force and Navy all prepare their IAs for deployment through a pre-deployment screening process that validates the operational readiness of their forces. The pre-deployment process sets the stage for the gaining command's ability to quickly integrate IAs into the fold. During the pre-deployment screening, the losing command validates an IA's readiness in the areas of personnel, finance and reenlistment.[15] In total, the Army, the Air Force and the Navy validate a total of 16 tasks combined.[16] The validated tasks not only cover areas that are crucial to the well-being of the IA but also that of the family left behind. The Army's Deployment Cycle Support (DCS) Checklist includes 13 tasks.[17] The Navy's

Expeditionary Screening Checklist lists 13 tasks;[18] and, the Air Force's United States Air Forces Central (USAFCENT) reporting instructions includes 11 tasks.[19]

The Army, Air Force and Navy have seven tasks in common that they validate in their pre-deployment screening. The first three tasks are updates to the record of emergency data, the Service Member's Group Life Insurance (SGLI) Election and Family Coverage Election for SGLI.[20] The updates to the record of emergency data and the SGLI election certificate are important because they are the source documents for all casualty operations.[21] The record of emergency data serves two purposes: "it becomes "an official and legal document that designates the beneficiaries of certain benefits in the event the individual is… missing… or deceased"; and, "it provides the name and address of the persons to be notified in case of an emergency, sickness, or death."[22] A completed and signed SGLI election certificate identifies "the amount of insurance coverage and beneficiary designation"[23] in the case of death. The last four tasks are completion of pending evaluations; career counseling, family care plan review and identification (ID) card update.[24]

To round out its 12 tasks, the Army validates six additional tasks. The first four tasks are verification of pending evaluations and pending awards, ID tag review and enrollment in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS).[25] The remaining two tasks are the review of the government travel charge card (GTCC) and identification of potential financial issues.[26] The Air Force validates an additional four tasks in its IA screening to complement the six all-service related tasks. The four tasks are the review of promotion eligibility, the verification of pending evaluations, the completion of the Eagle Cash Enrollment and Authorization Agreement; and, the review of ID tags.[27] Finally, the Navy

validates an additional six tasks in its IA screening. These six tasks include four personnel and two finance tasks. The four personnel tasks are the verification of pending evaluations, the review of promotion eligibility and the enrollment in TRICARE and DEERS.[28] The remaining two finance tasks are review of the government travel charge card and access for DFAS "My Pay".[29]

In the area of finance, the Air Force is the only service that does not screen the status of its IAs government travel charge card. By overlooking the GTCC review, the Air Force IAs are not afforded the opportunity to place their GTCC accounts in a mission critical status which is not automatic.[30] The mission critical status exists "when mission-critical travel precludes filing of travel vouchers, including interim vouchers, and thereby precludes prompt payment of travel charge card bills."[31] A review of the IA's GTCC also allows the losing command to ensure the IA has made payments for all "expenses incurred prior to the deployment… before the individual departs."[32] A GTCC review benefits the IA because it reaffirms his/her financial responsibilities; it also ensures the losing command has situational awareness of the IA's account.

Although the Air Force does not conduct a GTCC status review, it does ensure Air Force IAs complete the Eagle Cash Enrollment and Authorization Agreement. Enrollment in a stored value card (SVC) program such as the Eagle Cash or Navy/Marine Cash is imperative for IAs because of changes in the financial support in theater.[33] The finance support in theater no longer processes casual pay to "reduce the amount of U.S. currency in circulation overseas, and to take workload out of the base [f]inance office."[34] The Air Force is the only service currently that validates enrollment in the SVC program for IAs, but the

Navy is no stranger to the SVC program. The Navy has been using Navy Cash at sea since 1988 because it "provides for a cashless environment within the lifelines of the ship."[35] The Army and the Navy IAs would benefit from validating this task because it "eliminate[s] the need… to carry cash."[36]

The Army's task to identify potential financial problems is the most important of the other finance tasks validated. It is the most significant because it enables the losing command to set up assistance or training for the IA before deploying.[37] The unit's command financial specialist works with the IA and his/her family to cope "with financial situations for deployment."[38] The end result of the command financial specialist program is "to enhance and maintain mission readiness and quality of life" of the IA and his/her family and "achieve financial readiness."[39] The Navy and the Air Force already have command financial specialist programs that could assist in the preparation of their IAs for deployment. The Navy's command financial training is also a 40-hour block of instruction similar to the Army's and is an additional duty.[40] The Air Force provides the same expertise through the Airman and Family Services Flight Force Support career field which provide personal financial management.[41] The finance programs exist to provide Air Force and Navy IAs with financial counseling to better prepare them for deployment. The Air Force and Navy merely need to formalize the task to identify potential financial problems for IAs to reap the benefits of the finance classes.

In the areas of personnel, the Air Force is the only service that does not verify the enrollment of an IA's eligible dependents in DEERS. Verifying enrollment in DEERS is a must during the pre-deployment process because of the potential impact it may have on the

family. "DEERS serves as the database of record for eligibility" for all active duty service members and their families.[42] The Army, Air Force and Navy depend on DEERS in order "to provide ID cards or related personnel support to eligible persons."[43] DEERS also serves as a direct link for medical care for active duty service members and their families. "TRICARE is a managed and portable health care program… in DEERS."[44] With a direct connection to DEERS, the Navy is the only service that validates the enrollment of its IAs and their family members in TRICARE.[45] Although the Army verifies DEERS enrollment, it does not take the extra step to verify TRICARE enrollment.[46] Verification is easy since TRICARE is a component of DEERS. Air Force IAs should update DEERS enrollment in advance if their family members' eligibility will expire during their deployment.[47]   The Air Force losing command could verify DEERS and TRICARE eligibility while it is verifying the IA's ID card status because DEERS is the database of record for both.[48] IA families do not have access to medical care, the commissary or the exchange once their DEERS eligibility expires.[49] DEERS eligibility does not need to impact the quality of life of IA families if IAs validate all aspects of DEERS as they prepare for deployment.

The last personnel task that is important to an IA's career is the updating of evaluations and awards because of its effect on promotions and selections.[50] The Army, Air Force and Navy validate the completion of pending evaluations; however, the Navy limits the verification of evaluations to only global support assignment IAs and not individual augmentation manpower management IAs.[51] The Navy processes evaluations on all of its personnel and verifying the completion of pending evaluations should apply to all Navy IAs as well.[52] The Army is the only service that validates completion of pending awards. Navy and Air Force promotion and selection boards do verify awards as it relates to the official

photograph in the service member's board file.[53] Including the completion of pending awards while losing commands are validating the completion of pending evaluations is a simple task for the Navy and Air Force to add for their IAs.

IAs can deploy at a higher level of readiness by expanding the pre-deployment screening. The Army, the Air Force and the Navy overlooked three key areas from their checklists. The first of these three omissions is a review of the IA's electronic official military personnel file (OMPF) during the pre-deployment preparation. Although the Army, Air Force and Navy verify the completion of pending evaluations, this task does not encompass past evaluations. The Army's screening for pending awards is only concerned with current awards not past awards as well.[54] The OMPF is an electronic database that contains copies of the service member's service, performance and restricted documents such as evaluations, orders for awards and badges, SGLI elections, promotion orders, etc.[55] The military personnel records jacket (MPRJ) did contain all these documents at one time. The Army eliminated the MPRJ from use in June 2004[56] and replaced it with the OMPF. The Air Force followed suit in October 2004.[57] The Navy is in the process of transitioning to the OMPF. It has transitioned all of the officer files, but the enlisted files will not be complete until September 2010.[58] A review of the IA's entire military file would benefit the IA because it provides him/her an opportunity to do so which might not occur otherwise.

The electronic OMPF is a paperless system that makes maintaining the accuracy of a service member's OMPF very easy. IAs can also update missing documents with the same ease through their service personnel support team, but he or she must have access to the source document.[59] This requirement is why IAs must ensure their OMPFs are accurate

before deploying. OMPF accuracy is especially important if IAs are or will be in the zone of consideration for a selection or promotion board. Board members review documents from the OMPF in their consideration process.[60] The majority of IAs do not deploy with these documents, and they may not be selected if their files are incomplete. Updating the OMPF is easily resolved if IAs are required to review their OMPFs during the pre-deployment when the documents are readily accessible.

The second oversight is the timeframe the checklists cover which is a two-fold problem. The reception, staging, onward movement and integration (RSO&I) "is a sequential process that generates combat power"[61] once an IA arrives in theater. The Army's theater gateway teams can provide limited capabilities to update ID cards, records of emergency data and SGLIs during RSO&I, but this is a tertiary mission.[62] The TG teams provide these limited services to assist the gaining units during the integration of IAs.[63] The Air Force is the only other service that mans similar theater gateway teams with the same mission priority of providing limited personnel support as does the Army.[64] The integration phase is the last step of RSO&I which "helps reduce turbulence" as IAs "arrive at their units."[65]

First, the Army's DCS checklist is the only one that covers the entire deployment process from pre-deployment to redeployment with associated tasks for each stage.[66] After arriving to their final destinations, the Army IAs begin the integration or deployment stage once at their units with a review of the pre-deployment tasks.[67] This review should catch any oversights or changes before the IA gets consumed with his/her duties and responsibilities. No screening process is perfect. The Air Force and the Navy checklists only cover the pre-

deployment screening before the IA departs for theater.[68] Air Force and Navy IAs do not

have the same requirement to recheck the pre-deployment tasks once at their gaining

commands. Life events happen that may require additional updates while in theater. "The

goal [for IAs] is to be ready for employment as soon as possible."[69] The deployment stage

review should apply to all IAs. This is a proactive approach and demonstrates to the IAs that

they are part of the team regardless of service.

The second issue with the timeframe covered by the checklists is during rest and

recuperation (R&R) leave. Again, the Army's DCS checklist is the only one that covers this

period under the employment stage.[70] The Army's 10 R&R leave tasks are preventative in

nature for both the IA and his/her family.[71] The eight R&R tasks for IAs are publish R&R

leave schedule, conduct substance abuse, distribute risk reduction reintegration tip card,

conduct POV safety briefing, conduct suicide awareness and prevention training, Operation

READY reunion and reintegration training, communication with spouses, families and

children training; post-deployment battle mind training; and, Operation READY deployment

and children training.[72] The two remaining tasks for the families are Operation READY post-

deployment and battle mind training for families; and, Operation READY reunion and

reintegration training for spouses.[73] Air Force and Navy IAs may be eligible for rest and

recuperation leave and would benefit from the associated tasks as well as their families.

The last omission falls under the deployment stage. Confirming that an IA is

receiving all the combat zone pay and entitlements is essential to being financially

responsible.[74] If the combat zone pay does not start, it can adversely affect an IA's ability to

make "sound money management decisions."[75] The IA's family may also suffer and not be

able to meet the "financial realities of day-to-day military life" back at home station.[76] Even the Army's all-inclusive list does not contain this task that definitely applies to the other service components.[77] Any servicing finance office can verify the starting of the combat zone pay and entitlements.[78] IAs can also verify the starting of these entitlements by reviewing the entitlements section of their leave and earning statements.[79]

A task must exist to check an IA's entitlements because the initiation of the combat zone pay and entitlements is not automatic.[80] Deployment entitlements are supposed to start when the theater gateway (TG) team scans the IA's ID card upon arrival into theater.[81] A TG team establishes personnel accountability by scanning the ID cards of all arriving personnel and then provides the data to the finance team to start deployment entitlements.[82] Deployment entitlements may not start for three common reasons. First, the most common is that IAs do not process through the TG team and their ID cards are never scanned.[83] Second, the TG team does not provide the scanned data to the finance teams to start the deployment entitlements.[84] Lastly, the scanned data provided to the finance teams has errors which may cause deployment entitlements to not start.[85] Human error can cause these oversights to no fault of the IA. If left unchecked and these entitlements do not start, it could create an enormous amount of undue stress on both the IA and family.

Understanding how IAs are supported in theater is the foundation for the quality of service IAs receive. Once in theater, IAs must rely on the personnel support in theater to correct problems that the pre-deployment stage missed. The Army, the Air Force and the Navy do have personnel support teams to support their IA populations. The Army is filling over half of the IA requirements with the Air Force and Navy filling 40 percent of the

remaining requirements.[86] The Army, the Air Force and the Navy personnel teams provide

the same services that IAs receive at their home stations because of the robust

communications architecture of a mature theater.[87] Essential personnel support is all possible

due to the automated applications and databases that the services use.[88]

The Army, the Air Force and the Navy only use four similar web-based applications

and databases. The personnel teams are able to perform their two main missions through the

use of two of the four systems. These primary missions are personnel accountability and

strength reporting (PASR), and casualty operations.[89] To execute these very important

missions, all the services use the Deployed Theater Accountability Software used for PASR;

and, the Defense Casualty Information Processing System for casualty operations.[90] These

systems are event driven that do not provide a customer service function. Providing essential

personnel support is a tertiary mission.[91] Personnel teams use the remaining two systems to

generate ID or common access cards. These systems are DEERS and the Real-time

Automated Personnel Identification System.[92] Any personnel team, regardless of service,

can use these four systems to provide support, but only personnel support for the actions

linked to these systems.

To provide other personnel services, the Army, the Air Force and the Navy must rely

on service-specific systems because the service components do not use similar systems. This

lack of commonality does not allow for inter-service support to IAs. This drawback is why

IAs need to receive the best personnel support during the pre-deployment stage. The

Department of Defense (DOD) had funded a program to bridge the gap across the Army, the

Air Force and the Navy service-specific systems. One system was to integrate the personnel

and pay system across the three services and eliminate 90 existing systems.[93] After 12 years

of trying to bring the system online, DOD cancelled the program in February 2010. DOD

has no alternate system in development.[94] This one system would have been ideal for the

current situation of providing support for IAs. Its failure leaves IAs relying on their service-

specific support teams while deployed.

Present in the current environment are obstacles that make providing quality

personnel support for IAs a challenge. In broad terms, these obstacles are the varying levels

of pre-deployment screening to include the inconsistent numbers of validated tasks and

omissions from the checklists; and, the limitations of the automated systems used to provide

the personnel support to IAs. One could argue that both the screening process and the

automated systems are adequate for providing support for IAs. First, the Army, the Air Force

and the Navy have been preparing their IAs using their pre-deployment processes since the

United States initiated combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Every service member

regardless of whether he/she is an IA or is deploying with his/her unit completes the same

pre-deployment screening process. If significant complaints resulted from this processing,

the services would have changed their screening process.

Second, as the communications architecture has improved over the last nine years, so

too has the level of support. IAs can submit actions to their personnel support teams if the

pre-deployment processing did not catch the deficiencies or if changes exist. Personnel

teams can now process actions through web-based applications and databases. The Army,

the Air Force and the Navy all have portals that allow service members to view their personal

information such as Army Knowledge Online.[95] These automated systems also no longer

require service members to hand sign documents. Personnel teams can process many of these documents, such as an evaluation, with digital signatures which are included on the common access or ID card.[96]

Yes, the pre-deployment systems have existed for quite some time, but there have been changes. In the area of the preparation screening checklists, all three of the services have revised their checklists. Both the Air Force and the Navy have recently updated their checklists. The Air Force had made two revisions to its reporting instructions first in February 2010 and then again in April 2010.[97] As recent as April 2010, the Navy updated its checklist.[98] The Army made changes to its DCS checklist in March 2007.[99] The Navy also made additional structural changes in support of its IAs. The Navy stood up the Expeditionary Combat Readiness Center and charged it with preparing the majority of the Navy's IAs.[100] The Navy made an additional change in 2008 when it made United States Fleet Forces Command the executive agent for the IA continuum which supports IAs and their families.[101] The three services made these changes because of the high level of importance it places on taking care of IAs. These changes are also indicative of the fact that these IAs do not deploy with their units and must rely on an unknown command to support them. Getting these IAs prepared to the highest level of readiness is of the utmost importance.

In response to whether the pre-deployment screening needs to catch every deficiency since there are personnel teams in theater to correct errors, this concept is irresponsible. This view dehumanizes the personnel system which exists because people make up the services. "People are the most important asset in any military operation."[102] From an outsider's

perspective, an IA can just as easily submit an action in theater and get the same results. To

that IA, his/her action is more than a piece of paper. That action might make the difference

on a promotion board or adjust an incorrect date of rank that results in correcting a pay

problem. Although automated systems have benefits, these benefits do not compensate IAs

or their families for the stress they have endured. Providing IAs with the opportunity to

resolve issues prior to deploying is a must and is the most preferred solution. One of the

strategic objectives of personnel transformation is "delivering and executing" personnel

support "as close to the Soldier as possible."[103]   A well designed and executed validation

process that includes pre-deployment, integration and R&R leave demonstrates the true value

of IAs to the mission. It also demonstrates that the Army, Air Force and Navy are looking

out for the IA's well-being and that of their families'.

Recommendations

The joint forces commander must improve and expand the validation process for IAs.

In doing so, he will maximize the level of personnel readiness IAs achieve. This high level

of readiness will reduce the level of undue stress IAs may experience when unanticipated

personnel issues arise. "Action is essential to '…demonstrate responsible stewardship for the

national treasure entrusted to us – our men and women…' (GEN Shinseki, 12 Oct 99)."[104]

The joint forces command should make a standard validation process. First, he

should consolidate the checklists the Army, the Air Force and the Navy currently use into

one standard checklist. None of the tasks are service component specific. Once consolidated

into a list of 16 tasks, he should include a 17th task that requires a review of the IA's OMPF

to the pre-deployment screening.

The joint forces commander should then expand the validation process. The new process should include pre-deployment, deployment, employment, redeployment and post-deployment. The deployment or integration stage must act as a check and balance of the pre-deployment processing. It should catch any issues before the IA begins his/her duties. The deployment stage should include all the tasks previously validated in the pre-deployment stage and add an 18th task that verifies that an IA's combat zone pay and entitlements have begun. The employment stage should include all tasks that prepare IAs for R&R leave and revisit the tasks outlined in the pre-deployment stage. Incorporating these changes and making these reviews mandatory for the gaining commands will set the tone for the integration of IAs. These changes are minor, but relevant to every IA. The result is a higher operating strength for the joint forces commander to execute the mission. These are but two ways the joint forces commander should improve the personnel and finance support provided to IAs.

Standardizing criteria is not uncommon for IAs. CENTCOM has established a mandatory set of training requirements for all service members to complete prior to deployment.[105] Applying this same approach to the pre-deployment and integration processing is attainable. All of the tasks are applicable across the services. It guarantees that all IAs have had the same level of processing. Making these changes is a proactive approach and communicates to the IAs that their services and their gaining commands have their welfare and that of their families' first and foremost in their minds.

Conclusions

Preparing IAs for deployment ensures that they are at an optimal level of readiness. The Army, the Air Force and the Navy are validating the operational readiness of their IAs through their pre-deployment screening, but there are areas that they could improve. The processing is very similar and is adequate, but with recent changes, the services have identified that their screening is a work in progress. Room for improvement still exists. With modifications they could increase the level of readiness that their IAs are at when they arrive in theater and are ready to contribute to the overall mission when they hit the ground. The validation process is continuous and ends when the IAs are in the post-deployment stage.

Ensuring IAs receive the highest quality of personnel support especially during the validation process is of the utmost importance for the joint forces commander. Although it may seem irrelevant, personnel concerns can have a detrimental effect on morale and can be distracters that affect the mission. To best provide essential personnel support for IAs, the joint forces commander should improve the IA preparation and integration processes and change his support design. Making these minor changes will have an exponential impact of the operating strength of the joint force. "Effective personnel support, therefore, is the linchpin for successful joint operations."[106] It is taking care of the most important resource the joint forces commander has in his arsenal to accomplish the mission – his people.

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