

The Joint Evaluation Report— Career Enhancer or Kiss of Death

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The Armed Forces have experienced painful adjustments in their journey toward jointness. One area of continuing concern is the types of fitness reports, performance ratings, and evaluation reports used by the services. In joint duty assignments, the immediate supervisor responsible for drafting such reports, according to Joint Publication 0-2, *Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF)*, is likely to be an officer from a service other than

the ratee's. Since each service has its own system of evaluation, many supervisors lack experience in properly rating subordinates from other services. A standardized training program should be created to ensure that every rater can produce quality evaluations.

Assessing the Problem

Officials who rate personnel from other services often have a tough time keeping current on the differences among evaluation systems. It is hard enough to keep up with changes in one's own service. A manifestation of this difficulty is the fact that many joint organizations include a senior member of the ratee's own service in the evaluation chain to make the system work. But to

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transcend common sense and prove that conclusion is a greater problem. There are no studies on this subject and little evidence to show that much critical thought has been devoted to it. Is this problem real? How does the rater's lack of knowledge affect the ratee's level of involvement in preparing his own evaluation report? What would the rater and ratee do to improve the system?

A random survey was conducted of 129 faculty members and students involved in phase II of the program for joint education (PJE) at the Armed Forces Staff College. The sample group

ranged in rank from major/lieutenant commander (O4) to brigadier general/rear admiral (O7) and consisted of officers from all services. Respondents had various levels of joint experience, with an average tour of twenty months. While the respondents who lacked practical joint experience could not be used to substantiate rater knowledge, their input highlighted views on joint duty (see survey data in the overview below).

The survey was admittedly limited in several respects. First, because of the lack of a sufficient population, the sample did not contain enlisted personnel. Future studies should include this level. Second, the sample did not include officers assigned to combined units under supervision of allied officers whose experience might be similar to that of their counterparts serving in joint billets. Again, the results were generalized to include combined duty. Finally, the survey results may be optimistic in the satisfaction they indicate in the status quo because all respondents were selectees for phase II of PJE. One can imagine less satisfaction among nonselectees, especially if they attribute their status to weak performance reports. These limitations aside, the survey did provide insight into ratings in the joint environment.

Survey Findings

Raters do not feel thoroughly knowledgeable of other service rating systems. Of the 129 respondents 36 had some experience in rating joint personnel (on average of 23.6 months). Asked to assess their degree of understanding of the evaluation systems of other services, only 36 percent felt positive (see



1st Combat Camera Squadron (Jerry Mossman)

Overview of Survey Data

Demographics. The survey was administered at the Armed Forces Staff College, a component of the National Defense University located in Norfolk, Virginia, that prepares mid and senior-level officers for joint duty assignments. The total available population was 321 faculty members and students. The survey captured the responses of 129 randomly selected officers (40 percent of the total population), a sample that closely represented the actual number of officers (end strength) in each service.

	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force
Number of respondents	45	32	6	46
Percent of total	34.9	24.8	4.7	35.6
Officer end strength by service	79,580	56,964	17,885	75,343
Percent of total	34.6	24.8	7.8	32.8

Respondents by grade (rank):

O4 (major/lieutenant commander)	32	19	5	36
O5 (lieutenant colonel/commander)	12	13	1	8
O6 (colonel/captain)	1	—	—	1
O7 (brigadier general/rear admiral)	—	—	—	1

Analysis. Data was analyzed using statistics that tabulated the frequency at which each quantitative variable (score) occurred. The treatment selected divided the ordered data into groups to ensure that a certain percentage above and another was below. In addition, data was sorted by attributes (length of joint duty assignment, grade, and service). Subsequent frequencies were computed after sorting into the different groups.

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figure 1 below). By service, Army officers felt the most informed, though not strongly. The Marine Corps ranked second, while the Navy and Air Force felt slightly less knowledgeable.

This lack of expertise is not surprising given the amount of training raters received on other service rating systems. Asked if they had received some standard instruction such as unit training, 78 percent said they had little or none (see figure 2 below). Report of this shortfall was essentially balanced across the services.

The ratee feels that supervisors lack sufficient knowledge of other service rating systems. From the above discussion, it would make sense that the ratee might lack confidence in his rater's knowledge of different evaluation systems. When asked about confidence in the understanding of raters

in their own rating systems, only 30 percent expressed some level of faith, while 55 percent felt raters lacked sufficient understanding and 15 percent were neutral. Respondents with no joint experience expressed only a 48 percent negative response (and the positive

response was the same in both groups, 30 percent). Perceptions of rater knowledge (by those with no joint experience) thus appear very close but slightly more optimistic than actual rater knowledge. In other words, the confidence of the average officer in his rater's knowledge of the

evaluation system decreases after starting work at a joint duty assignment (figure 3 on page 68).

Respondents have mixed feelings on the effect of joint duty assignments on promotion potential. When respondents with no joint experience assessed the impact they anticipated a joint duty assignment to have on future promotions, 73 percent thought it would be positive, 26 percent neutral, and only 3 percent negative. By comparison, in the group with joint experience only 50 percent felt their joint duty assignment would positively influence promotions, 20 percent felt it would have a negative impact, and 30 percent thought it would not affect promotion (figure 4 on page 68). Thus the average officer seems less optimistic about promotion after joint duty. Results were fairly balanced across service lines, with the Navy responding slightly more positively and the Marines somewhat less.

The ratee serving in a joint duty assignment is more involved in preparing his evaluation. When indicating their involvement in preparing their own evaluations in non-joint assignments, 68 percent reported that they wrote at least some of it. Although this appears higher than desired, the number increases in joint duty assignments where 78 percent claim some participation (see figure 5 on page 69). This is probably a reflection of findings 1 and 2 above (such as the lack of rater knowledge and a ratee's lack of confidence in his rater's understanding of other service evaluation systems). Naval officers reported the highest level of involvement in non-joint as well as joint duty assignments, while marines reported the largest jump in involvement between them (see figure 6 on page 69).

Analyzing the Data

The lack of confidence in rater knowledge (and the raters' admitted lack of expertise) can cause the perception that joint duty is an unwise career move. While the Goldwater-Nichols Act addressed this problem by mandating that promotion rates for joint qualified officers must be equal to or exceed those for non-joint qualified officers, this survey indicates that joint duty assignments may still have a stigma, caused in part by the current method of preparing evaluations. This could lead quality people to avoid such duty despite legislative safeguards.

The increased involvement of joint personnel in the preparation of their own evaluations is a problem that warrants our attention. Because of the level of rater knowledge, a member is often compelled to write at least some of his evaluation report to produce a quality product that complies with service guidelines. This is at best uncomfortable, forcing a servicemember to boast about his

respondents have mixed feelings on the effect of joint duty assignments on promotion potential

Figure 1. Self-Assessment of Understanding of Evaluation Systems of Other Services

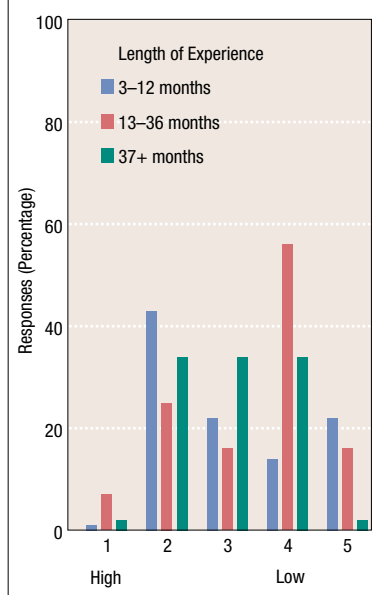
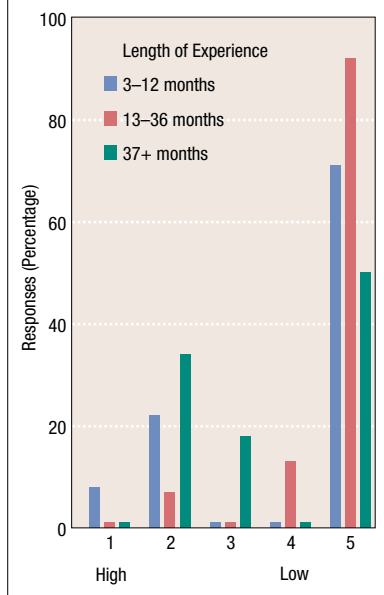


Figure 2. Amount of Formal Training Reported as a Joint Rater



accomplishments and rate himself in comparison with peers. We condemn careerism and promote service to the Nation. How then can we permit a servicemember to either write his own report or let a rater hinder his career with an evaluation that might not allow him to compete?

As previously noted, the main issue emerging from the survey is lack of rater knowledge of evaluation systems in other services. Decision-makers can consider two approaches for modifying the current system.

the DOD-wide officer evaluation would add a fifth system to a burgeoning network of forms and regulations

The process could be changed by creating a DOD-wide or a joint duty-specific evaluation report. Or a standardized program of training aimed at improving

rater knowledge could be implemented. The advantages and disadvantages of these approaches, including feedback from survey results, are discussed below.

Approach I: Change the System

DOD-wide evaluation system. The radical solution would be creating a common evaluation system for every service with Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force using the same form and governing regulation. A rater's lack of knowledge concerning another service's system would no longer be an issue since all officers would be evaluated under common criteria. The rater could not

only write a meaningful evaluation but save considerable time normally spent finding and studying unfamiliar manuals and regulations to grasp another service's system. This solution would also provide a common point of reference for promotion board members, especially at senior levels.

But there are disadvantages. First, it would be difficult to develop a standard system that allowed detailed documentation of an officer's job performance, particularly during service-specific assignments. Creating a common DOD system would be extremely time consuming at best and impossible at worst. But even if an equitable, sensible methodology could be developed, acceptance by every service is doubtful, given the natural proclivity in maintaining institutional identities complete with a unique language and culture. The survey confirmed this deduction. Overall, 53 percent of the respondents rejected a common evaluation while 26 percent were neutral. Marine Corps officers were the most adamant in their opposition (83 percent), followed by Army officers (56 percent), Navy officers (50 percent), and Air Force officers (48 percent).

Joint duty assignment evaluation. Another solution would have an evaluation system for joint duty assignments. Such a system could ensure that officers, regardless of service, are rated under standard criteria and procedures. Like a common evaluation, it would simplify the process, giving raters only one (albeit an initially unfamiliar) rating tool. The services might even be willing to allow a temporary invasion of their prerogatives, provided officers reverted to their parent system after joint duty assignments. Like the DOD-wide officer evaluation, the joint report would provide common reference points for promotion boards (but only for joint duty assignments).

This option also has disadvantages. First, rather than streamlining the current procedures, it would add a notional fifth system to a burgeoning network of forms and regulations. It would also require training all officers assigned to joint billets as well as anyone who is selected to serve on a promotion board. In addition, if promotion boards viewed this evaluation method as inferior for some reason, a joint officer might not compete as well as his service counterparts. However, the most significant drawback, as discussed earlier, is that the services would likely be unwilling to reduce their institutional control over the evaluation and promotion process. Overall, 56 percent of those surveyed disapproved of this idea (16 percent were neutral). The Marines again led the way (67 percent), followed by the Navy (66 percent), Army (64 percent), and Air Force (39 percent).

Figure 3. Ratee's Confidence in Rater's Understanding of Service Evaluation Systems

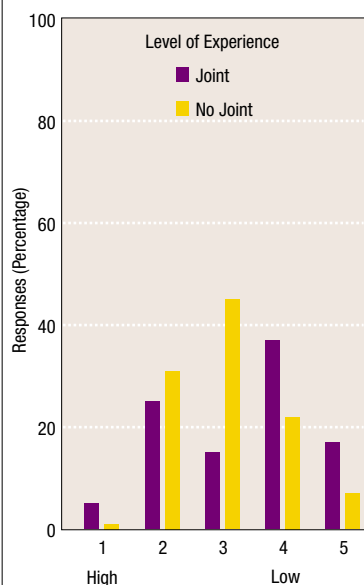
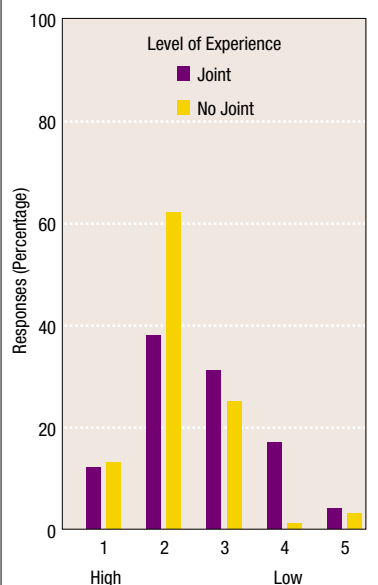


Figure 4. Anticipated Impact of Joint Evaluations on Future Promotion Potential



Plotting coordinates,
Fool Eagle '98.



1st Combat Camera Squadron (Jim Vanhegy)

out of joint

Approach II: Standardize Training

Rather than changing the current method, another approach might be a formal standardized training program to ensure that raters know how

to write meaningful and career enhancing (if warranted) reports on subordinates from other services. Over 96 percent of survey participants felt that some type of standardized training should be required for rating officers in joint duty.

Although the advantages of standardized training are obvious, implementation is less clear. Options could be executed unilaterally or in combination: publishing a common DOD manual, introducing a block of instruction in either phase I or II of PJE, and presenting standardized training on assuming a joint duty assignment.

DOD manual/handbook. A single reference for preparing evaluations reports with a section dedicated to each service would greatly enhance the ability of a rater. The guide would not require formal training as long as the rater studied it carefully. Essential elements of each section would be a sample evaluation with a definition of terms, step-by-step instructions on completing the form, and a brief explanation of each service's promotion process (including the role and weight of the report in selection). Although raters would still have to know three other evaluation systems, they would not waste time trying to interpret regulations from other services. Periodic review and updates would keep the manual current and an Internet web page would enable timely notification of changes to service procedures. In the survey, 57 percent of the respondents thought a standard DOD manual would increase rater competence.

Figure 5. Ratee's Level of Involvement in Preparing Own Evaluation by Experience

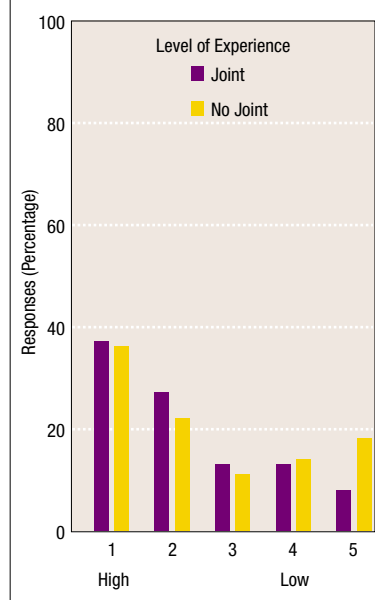
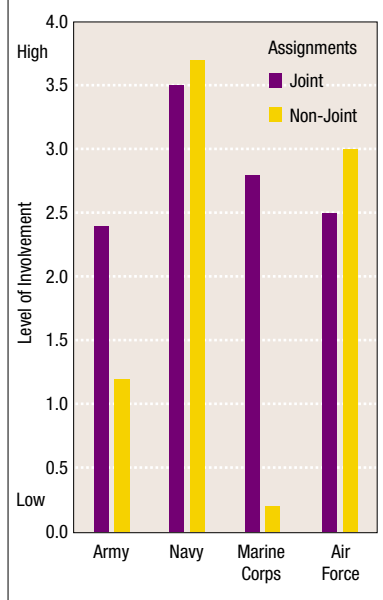


Figure 6. Ratee's Level of Involvement in Preparing Own Evaluation by Service





Fleet Imaging command, Atlantic (Leland B. Comer)

Gathering information,
Global Guardian '99.

Standardized training in phase I of PJE. A standardized block of instruction during phase I at the intermediate level (staff college) would provide a more formal method of training raters. Officers normally get their first exposure to joint doctrine and operations during this phase; thus an introduction to the rating systems of other services would be appropriate. While most graduates of intermediate staff schools do not go straight into a joint duty assignment, an extensive training program would probably be a waste of time and assets. The survey respondents concurred, with only 16 percent thinking that training during this phase was a good idea. The main goal at this point in one's career might be to provide an overview of different rating systems and describe the standard training program.

Standardized training in phase II of PJE. Standardized instruction at the Armed Forces Staff College would be logical and cost effective. Since graduates are already in or heading to joint duty assignments, the knowledge they gain would have instant value. One approach to formal standardized training might be dedicating six hours (two per each other service) wherein the course readings provide the basis for practical exercises. The standard text could be the manual mentioned above. Introducing this instruction would be virtually free since it could be spread over several days without extending the length of the course.

Some 43 percent of participants thought formal training should be offered during phase II. The major downside is that it would not train all raters since only a portion attend PJE. A supplemental program would have to handle this shortfall.

Standardized training at joint unit level. A fourth avenue for educating would be presenting a standardized program at the joint unit level. This would benefit those who have not yet attended phase II of PJE and those unable to attend. It would require designating and training an evaluation trainer, probably as additional duty, who would present standardized instruction within a given time after new officers report for duty. Again, a DOD manual could provide the foundation. A training briefing would be another vehicle to ensure standardization in joint headquarters (and could be incorporated in phase II of PJE). While instruction has a price (namely, in loss of training time), the benefits outweigh the sacrifice. The result would be a generation of raters who are prepared to give subordinates quality evaluations. Some 67 percent of those surveyed favored this approach.

It is apparent that many officers serving in joint duty assignments lack the expertise to rate subordinates from other services. Standardized rater training is needed to improve evaluations in joint organizations. Although there are distinct advantages in developing a joint evaluation system, survey respondents strongly disapproved of such an approach. With more service interoperability, however, the idea may gain acceptance.

Meanwhile a standard training program presented during phase II of PJE or at the joint unit level would acquaint raters with variations in service evaluation systems. Better understanding of these subtleties is essential to writing quality reports. In addition, a common DOD manual on evaluations would provide the basis for uniformity throughout the Armed Forces. As joint raters become more proficient, many apprehensions and misgivings on the part of ratees will be alleviated. Despite such advances, one should not view standardized training as a panacea. A more extensive study is required. Until then, the senior servicemembers in each joint organization must continue to review evaluations written by raters from other services.

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