

# Building Squad Readiness...

*Does the sweet scent of fresh paint and mowed grass turn into the headache of a training mission badly out of focus?*

By MAJ Anthony Vesay

**S**pit and polish count. But, combine it with a one-day, two-phase "Squad Readiness Program" and you do two things: You bring training back into focus and answer the question of whose unit is really the "best" on the post.

On the surface, everything can look good. But what happens if an inspection team—after reviewing all the "readiness" records—issues the unit an operation order and then rolls them out the gate to perform their mission?

The Squad Readiness Program is a two-phase, intensive squad inspection.

The first phase, maintenance, focuses on the accountability, serviceability and deployability of the personnel and equipment in a squad. Training, the second phase, looks at the squad's ability to safely deploy—lock, stock and barrel—and accomplish an MOS-related mission.

The company commander chairs a results-focused After Action Review (AAR) when the squad returns. The results are posted on the squad readiness board, which neatly hangs on the orderly room's wall. In short, the Squad Readiness Program is the measuring stick that attests to the squad's combat readiness.

All readiness evaluations are conducted during the respective platoon's maintenance day with, ideally, no more than one readiness test per week (else the company support systems and evaluators become overtaxed).

No rollouts are held during company maintenance days (i.e. Monday). The selection of the evaluated platoon is identified in the Commander's Quarterly Training Guidance, giving units fair warning when they're next in the barrel. Platoon leaders select the test squad.

The only restrictions are that a certified squad is exempted until all other

squads from the same platoon have passed. Give priority to squads that haven't been tested versus those that have failed and need to be retested. Exceptions, such as a certified squad that has undergone so many personnel changes that a new evaluation is warranted, are always possible.

The Readiness Program follows a carefully scripted sequence of events. It begins with an operations order the day before the actual readiness test and continues throughout the following day. It concludes with a comprehensive AAR where each company evaluator briefs the chain of command on the recently completed events. They also hand the platoon leader handwritten comments, positive and negative, on DA Form 2404. The loop isn't closed until the platoon and squad leaders brief the commander on their corrective actions.

## Sequence of Events:

### 1500 (orders day)

- The company TOC/Operations cell issues its order to the squad. Usually given by the executive officer (XO).
- The squad leader begins his planning process, issues his warning order and in conjunction with his team leaders, prepares his time schedule.

**Keys to success:** *The XO should hold a meeting a day before issuance of the order to resolve potential conflicts.*

*Keep the order simple enough that the MOS-related mission doesn't get bogged down in a myriad of support and security tasks. It's critical that the squad leader develop a time line (rehearsals, chow, weapons draw, operations order, etc.) and use his team leaders to ensure events are accomplished.*

### 0900 (mission day)

- The Phase 1 inspection (maintenance) begins. The focus is on serviceability and accountability of assigned equipment. Company in-

spectors from five sustainment areas—maintenance, NBC, communications, supply and weapons—evaluate equipment and records in each of their respective areas. The motor pool is usually the best place to conduct the evaluation

**Keys to success:** *Although inspectors have ample time to "teach," the focus should be on inspecting. Squad members need to have everything "dress right dress" and know the standards inside out. You're exactly right if you think this is a cookbook approach. Knowledgeable, prepared squads begin to execute on automatic pilot and end up passing with flying colors.*

### 1300

- The phase 2 inspection (training) begins with the commander's inspection. The company commander or 1SG inspects the squad, focusing on uniformity, mission knowledge, completeness of the packing list and availability of mission essential equipment.

**Keys to success:** *Layouts and uniforms must conform to the published policy. Check for all those little things that drive everyone crazy (chin straps, helmet insignia, Goretex, etc.) It's imperative for the squad leader to have completed his operations order and "actions on" rehearsals before inspection.*

### 1330-1600

- The training portion continues as the squad rolls out the gate to the mission site. Integral unit operations such as NBC and communications are also evaluated.

**Keys to success:** *Representatives from the TOC, and usually NBC and communications (integral operations) handle this portion. This squad must operate as a team. (Make sure PVT Dokes isn't the only qualified M60 gunner, M8 alarm operator and the only person with a security clearance to operate the radio. You may find he's not only all of this, but drives the vehicle, too!*

### 1600

- The squad returns and is issued a



The Squad Readiness Program puts squad leaders in the spotlight and involves them from the orders process all the way through mission completion.

clude the briefing by asking every squad member what went right and what went wrong. Pass or fail, the platoon leadership has up to 15 days to brief the corrected 2404s to the commander. Whatever the end result, all are winners and the unit gets a little better.

### Scoring:

All evaluated areas from both phases are recorded on DA Form 2404, Pre-Maintenance Checks and Services. Deficiencies as well as strong points are listed. Objective standards, as established by the company leadership, are used and the company commander, platoon leader and inspector keep copies.

Numerical scores are then given and translate into three ratings: exceeds standards (90-100), meets standards (70-89) and needs improvement (below 70). Display scores on a four-foot square squad readiness board located in the orderly room. Any squad that meets or exceeds standards is recognized in company formation and allowed to stencil

the coveted company mascot on their squad vehicle. There's no longer any doubt about the squad's readiness.

The readiness board mirrors the score sheet with the exception that the squad leader's name is listed across the top and the squad's score is now included with the scores from all of the other squads. This highly visible report card brings into focus just who really is the "best."

The program also serves as a valuable counseling tool and is an innovative way to reward those who meet the standard. It refocuses the entire unit on its true calling—rolling out the gate and accomplishing the mission.

As with any new program, there are some costs. The unit, with its plate already full, will feel there just isn't time to add something else. There also is the initial investment among the leadership to establish the standards and evaluative criteria.

Finally, there are maintenance costs of continuing the program such as updating the standards, reviewing trends and keeping the readiness board current.

## Score Sheet

MAINTENANCE	Possible Points	Score
Vehicles*	(10)	
Integral Operations**	(20)	
NBC	(10)	
Commo	(10)	
Supply	(10)	
Weapons	(10)	
<b>Total (Phase 1)</b>	<b>(30)</b>	
*Vehicles always inspected		
**Integral Operations: 2 of 4 areas evaluated		
TRAINING	Possible Points	Score
Commander's Inspection	(10)	
Troop Leading Procedures	(20)	
MOS-Related Mission	(20)	
Integral Operations***	(10)	
NBC	(5)	
Commo	(5)	
Supply	(5)	
Weapons	(5)	
Written Test	(10)	
<b>Total (Phase 2)</b>	<b>(70)</b>	
***Integral Operations: 2 of 4 areas evaluated		
<b>OVERALL SCORE</b> (Phase 1 +Phase 2 totals).....[ ]		
Rating (circle one): ES    MS    NI		

What we found was that these costs were more than worth it. In fact, as the program got off the ground, leaders replaced their firefighting mentality with a more proactive approach.

When outside inspections were imminent, the "Chinese fire drill" and "spit and polish" methods were replaced with attitudes of sustained readiness and continuous improvement. With everyone working toward a common goal, blood pressures and stress levels were lowered, the plate began to empty and results took off.

### Summary

The Squad Readiness Program is a garrison training program that develops junior leaders and builds units to field excellence and toughness. It's a proven system that provides healthy competition with clear and measureable standards.

In short, the freshly mowed grass and spit and polish floors, *combined* with a combat-ready unit, leaves no doubt to who really is the "best." ■

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short (10-question) written test reinforcing the recently completed mission. Two different tests are given; one to leaders and one to the soldiers.

**Keys to success:** Keep the questions straightforward and relevant to the recently completed mission. And, since everyone always does After Operations PMCS, there's really no need to check this area—but do it anyway.

1630-1730 ■

• The readiness evaluation concludes with the After Action Review (AAR). Company evaluators, the platoon leadership and all squad members attend.

**Keys to success:** Have each evaluator brief from prepared transparencies that match the published standards. Although the evaluation is on the squad, there is no secret that the platoon's training and support systems are also being evaluated. The company commander and XO keep the briefing flowing and the finger pointing to a minimum. To drive everything home, the commander should capture trends from previous evaluations and con-