

Inspector-Instructor Duty

A rewarding assignment
by LtCol Thomas Przybelski

Inspector-Instructor (I-I) duty is a hidden gem of an assignment. It can seem out of the mainstream of the Marine Corps, yet it is potent in its challenges and rewards. At most sites, it is an opportunity to live in a civilian community with a broad scope of duties while still leading Marines and training for deployment. The breadth of duties can cover those normally associated with positions from company to installation commander. It can be a heady mix of expectations and authority for a small active duty staff. So what does an I-I do? The *Gazette* has published a number of articles over the decades that still provide good insight as well as a long view of the assignment.¹ For my part, I recommend I-I staffs think in terms of four tasks—develop, backstop, enable, and communicate—in order to stay focused on unit readiness.

Develop

Most importantly, I-Is develop the unit associated with the site through training, mobilization preparation, and manpower management. The challenge is in the prioritization and efficiency necessary to accomplish the task given a base of only 38 training days a year. Generally, that 38 days looks like 1 to 4 days a month, for a total of 24 days (48 “drills”), and 2 weeks of “annual training” (AT) each year, using the same *Training and Readiness Manual* as the Active Component. The AT can be anything from unit planned training at a regional base to a part of the unit participating in an overseas exercise to Service-level venues like the Mountain Warfare Training Center. For many units, the Integrated

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In addition to training common to the specific type of unit, the unit must be prepared to mobilize. Marine Forces Reserve (MFR) consistently sources regularly occurring deployments that require everything from individual augments to entire battalions. While forecasted mobilizations are standard, the unit also needs to be able to mobilize unexpectedly in response to a crisis. Elements of the I-I staff work persistently on medical and dental, equipment maintenance, supply, and administrative readiness in support of this effort.² The most recent short-notice mobilizations of large units happened in the uncertain years following 11 September 2001. An after-action review conducted by MFR in 2004 noted that units up to that time generally did not receive an official notification message until three to five days ahead of the activation date. After mustering on the activation date, units spent an average of eleven days at the home training center before moving on to an intermediate location (ILOC), like Camp Lejeune or Camp Pendleton, for further training. Units then spent varying amounts of time at the ILOC before going overseas but averaged only fourteen days.³ This actual timeline for activated units also aligns with the current Service-level guidance (MAID-P) that directs Reserve units to be prepared to travel from the home training center to an ILOC and be available for follow-on travel overseas at 30 days post-activation.⁴ While there could be wide variation in the timeline for an actual deployment, the I-I staff needs to keep in mind how short the time windows

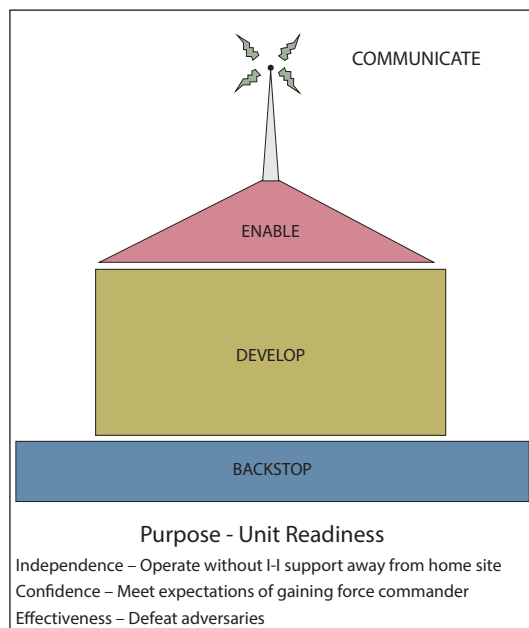


Figure 1. Inspector-Instructor tasks.

Training Exercise (ITX) provides the most challenging combined arms experience and is the primary opportunity for Reserve units to function within a MAGTF. The annual training schedule, or “drill schedule,” is largely oriented on the AT, or a group of ATs, to which the unit is assigned—as well as to the baseline annual training requirements for individual Marines.

are in the guidance and actually were in practice.

Recruiting and retention are also central to unit development. The I-I staff, including the full-time career planner, works with recruiters to bring in new and prior-service Marines from the surrounding area and connects with prior-service SNCOs and officers nationwide to serve in critical billets. In addition, the I-I staff affects the retention of the unit's Marines through its personal interaction as well as by designing quality training throughout the year. As the unit refreshes about 25 percent of the force each year, the I-I staff has an important role in bringing newly joined Marines into the unit and in developing them in line with unit goals.

Backstop

While developing the unit is the most obvious task, there are a number of other important functions that fall largely on the I-I staff. Importantly, the unit and I-I staff, working as a team, need to pass the major inspections that generally (and hopefully only) occur in one-a-year intervals at the lieutenant colonel and independent command level.⁵ While the unit is integral to these inspections, the month-in and month-out work must be supervised, and primarily done, by the I-I staff. The I-I staff handles equipment maintenance, facilities upkeep, budgeting, and casualty calls among other key areas. Many staff members have three or more collateral billets in furtherance of this effort. In addition, while able to pay unit members to assist, the I-I staff is directly responsible for funeral honors assigned by the Casualty Branch, HQMC. These are “no-fail” missions and must be handled well every time. Some sites conduct several hundred funeral honors a year with an I-I staff of ten.

In addition to functional areas subject to inspection, the I-I staff backstops the unit for tasks which the unit leadership will simply not have the time to accomplish. One might hear that the unit “should” be doing something, but really that would only be possible if the unit was activated. Within the available drill schedule, unit leadership may only be able to stay abreast of, not execute,



On 22 June 2017, a Marine with Golf Company, 2/25 Mar, 4thMarDiv, MARFORRES, fires on range 400 as part of an Integrated Training Exercise 4-17 at Twentynine Palms. (Photo by LCpl Imari Dubose.)

many activities. For example, the unit's operations officer may write an annual training plan outlining the goals and assigned months for live fire exercises, but the I-I staff will need to provide significant support for requesting ranges and ammunition, designing a civilian and tactical vehicle transportation plan, and aligning weapons and communications maintenance timelines among many other details. The weight of these tasks on the I-I makes some sense when understanding that some of the positions on I-I staffs are “integrated,” meaning that those individuals are filling billets directly in the unit's table of organization, and will deploy with the unit if activated. A “one team” mentality is central to understanding the I-I/unit relationship and integrated billets are a clear indicator of that expectation.

Community relations are also a long-standing feature of I-I duty. While recruiting stations are also spread out across the country, they are tightly focused on activities that lead to contracting and shipping applicants. Therefore, I-I staffs carry out a significant part of the Marine Corps' connection with civilian communities. I-I sites get requests for color guards, speakers at meetings, coaches, and guests for organizational dinners, as examples, while also serving as a hub for the annual Toys for Tots effort. Generally, community relations is

a rewarding part of I-I duty—like color guard assignments for the 2016 season Cubs games—but one that should enhance unit readiness rather than detract from it.

Enable

While developing and backstopping are largely the must-do work of the I-I, each individual can enable the unit beyond the mandatory functions. I-I staff members bring personal experiences and creativity to the assignment that can enrich the unit and the staff. Whether it is an interest in martial arts or military history, a background in staff training, or having been a mountain warfare instructor, I-I staff members bring fresh and interesting options to the annual cycle. Additionally, I-I staff members can add to a rewarding tour by taking advantage of personal development through PME, course work toward a degree, or through access to what is often an exceptional range of community events, museums, and sports teams among other options.

Communicate

Finally, the I-I staff has a particularly strong communication requirement. While any unit needs to communicate, I-I staffs are small and often tens or hundreds of miles from a headquarters or adjacent unit site. All levels of the

chain of command travel regularly to see things in person, but the staffs must be able to consistently articulate challenges and ask for support from off-site sources while also interacting directly with local officials and media outlets. This responsibility is important during normal operations but becomes even more so during natural disasters, like the 2017 flooding in Houston, or other types of local and regional crises. Additionally, the I-I staff must maintain contact with the unit. Key unit leaders and the Marines themselves have job, school, and family commitments that can keep them from being immediately available. Staffs need to work with their counterparts to develop effective times, methods, and amount of information to pass in order to maintain a common understanding of unit challenges. Overall, I-I staffs have a lot of trust placed in them to train Marines and represent the Marine Corps in remote locations. Good communication is central to maintaining that trust.

Purpose

The four tasks noted above are oriented on a purpose of unit readiness. As an I-I, I thought of readiness in three terms: independence, confidence, and effectiveness.

First, the unit, with its integrated I-I Marines, must be able to function independently of the site location and the non-integrated I-I staff. The unit will have gaps in training but must have the capacity to quickly close those gaps within a short mobilization period. Additionally, while a supporting consideration, I-I staff remaining at a site after a mobilization must maintain the ability to function independently of the unit. Funeral honors, casualty calls, community relations, facilities upkeep, and force protection are some of the work that will still happen after a unit mobilization.

Confidence is the second element of unit readiness. The unit moves through its annual cycle of training and inspections in order to remain confident in its ability to integrate with the Active Component structure upon activation and to communicate that ability up the chain of command. Similarly, the I-I staff guides the annual training effort



Bn HQ, 2/24 Mar, annual training 2018 at MC MWTC in Bridgeport, CA. (Photo by author.)

with an understanding of what a gaining force commander would expect in order to have confidence in the unit. As quoted in MFR's 2004 mobilization review, then-Gen Michael W. Hagee, Commandant of the Marine Corps, noted his confidence at the time: "Our Marine reservists are Marines first and there was absolutely no difference in performance."⁶

Finally, whereas confidence is friendly focused, effectiveness is enemy focused. The I-I staff helps orient the limited time and resources on training that will be effective against the toughest adversaries. As the battalion commander for 2/24 Mar asserted while deployed in 2004, the battalion was operating in "the most dangerous place in Iraq."⁷ Units with good I-I staffs are ready for that challenge.

Notes

1. T.G. Davis, "Prepare for I-I," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: June 1962). See also Gary E. Elliott, "What To Expect From I&I Duty," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: May 1971); and Ronald B. Helle, "Reflections of an Inspector-Instructor," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: January 1989).

2. One cannot talk about I-I duty without mentioning Reserve administration. It is complex

and has significant differences from Active Component administration. In a review of *Gazette* articles, writers consistently, and as far back as 1948, noted the challenges. Carl J. Fleps, "Organized Reserve Duty Is No Frolic," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: October 1948). The reference for administration is Head Quarters Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Order 1001R.1K, Marine Corps Reserve Administration Management Manual*, (Washington, DC: March 2009).

3. Marine Corps Combat Development Center, "Marine Corps Reserve Forces in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM: Lessons Learned," (Quantico, VA, January 2004).

4. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCO 3000.19B, Mobilization, Activation, Integration, Deactivation Plan*, (Washington, DC: December 2013).

5. The four major inspections: Force Readiness Assessment & Assistance Program (FRAAP—inspects mobilization readiness), Marine Corps Administrative Analysis Team (MCAAT), Field Supply Maintenance Analysis Office (FSMAO), and Command General's Inspection (CGI).

6. "Marine Corps Reserve Forces in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM: Lessons Learned."

7. Ken Sengupta, "This is Now the Most Dangerous Place in Iraq," *CounterPunch*, (November 2004), available at <https://www.counterpunch.org>.

