

First Things First

Focusing Oversight on a Dynamic Department

By Inspector General Gordon S. Heddell

I still remember that morning on July 23, 2008, as I was preparing to testify before the Senate Appropriations Committee on the effectiveness of U.S. efforts to combat corruption, waste, fraud, and abuse in Iraq. Seated at the same table was then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England.

I had just introduced myself to the presiding chairman, Robert Byrd of West Virginia, and watched as other senators prepared with their staffs, waiting for the hearing to begin. I was suddenly about to testify on major issues of national importance based on “extensive experience” that consisted of exactly one week as the acting inspector general of the Department of Defense.



Of all the questions that I was prepared to answer, the one for which I had no logical response was the one that kept going through my mind, “How did I ever let myself get into this situation?”

What seemed to me to be even more unbelievable was the fact that I had already testified at a congressional hearing, which took place just two days before, and I was also in the process of getting ready to testify one week later on electrical safety issues in Iraq. Count them up – three congressional hearings in my first two weeks on the job. In fact, during my first few months as the acting inspector general at DoD, I testified more times than I had in seven years as the inspector general of the Department of Labor.

And during the seven years that I was at the Department of Labor – four people, including two Senate-confirmed IGs and two acting IGs, held the position of inspector general at the Department of Defense. Whatever this job had going for it, it certainly was not longevity. With seven years of experience as the inspector general for the Department of Labor, where one of the top investigative priorities was the pursuit of labor racketeering and organized crime, I was certainly not a newcomer to this profession. However, nothing could have adequately prepared me for the enormity of the mission at the Department of Defense.

Whoever holds this job has a staff of over 1,600 people that must provide oversight to a massive organization with multiple missions and presence in over 150 countries. DoD has an annual budget of over \$600 billion, has over 1.4 million men and women on active duty, and employs over 718,000 civilian personnel. Another 1.1 million men and women serve in the National Guard and reserve forces, and more than two million retirees and families receive benefits from the Department.

I knew from the beginning of what I thought would be a temporary assignment, that even in the short run, this was not going to be an easy job. I had every intention of returning to the Department of Labor. However, after six months passed, I found myself agreeing to make this temporary job permanent. If I had to explain my reasons, I would have to say that despite the many challenges this position carries, it has an incredible capacity to do a lot of good for our nation, our warfighters, and the American taxpayer.

For instance, the Defense Criminal Investigative Service, the investigative arm of DoD IG, is typically involved in approximately 1,750 criminal investigations. We conduct approximately 120 audits, 200 senior official investigations, and open around 4,000 Defense Hotline cases each year. On top of that, we also conduct investigations involving whistleblower reprisal allegations and

numerous complex assessments of contingency operations in Southwest Asia.

On occasion, however, I do find a moment to pause and reflect at my desk while looking out the window at the Pentagon across the street. Behind the Pentagon are rows and rows of white headstones in Arlington National Cemetery. The sheer number of grave markers says far more than any of the numbers cited above. We are charged to identify areas where DoD must take action to improve and correct weaknesses and deficiencies that ultimately affect the safety and welfare of our troops.

Due to the importance of the mission and sheer size of the Department, I identified three critical focus areas to pursue as inspector general. These focus areas, I believe can help us build a model oversight organization. Those areas are:

- Health, safety, and welfare of our men and women in uniform.
- Issuing timely and relevant audit and oversight reports that identify fraud, waste, and abuse.
- Taking care of people and communicating effectively.

I hope that by sharing my experience in addressing these critical areas that others in the inspector general community will benefit. We provide oversight in order to improve our respective departments, but we do so by helping each other and sharing best practices, moving forward and constantly improving.



Health, Safety and Welfare of U.S. Troops

We know that our responsibility for oversight is about more than just dollars – it is about the well-being of the people who serve and defend our country. We have to make sure they get the best equipment – the best leadership – the best oversight possible. We are concerned by any issue affecting the health and safety of U.S. troops and obstructing the Department from effectively accomplishing its mission. Nowhere is that mission more apparent than in the treatment of our wounded warriors.

To that end, on March 17, 2011, we issued a report addressing the warrior care and transition program administered by the U.S. Army at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. The report is a first in a series to discuss our assessment of the care, management, and transition of recovering service members at warrior units. We reviewed the procedures to assist warriors with their return to active duty status or transition to civilian life as well as the DoD programs for warriors affected with traumatic brain injury and posttraumatic stress disorder.

We released another report on March 31, 2011, titled “Allegations Concerning Traumatic Brain Injury Research Integrity in Iraq.” We found that a clinical trial had been conducted in Iraq in which non-prescription, over-the-counter supplements were used in place of recommended treatments to determine if it was effective in the use of mild traumatic brain injury. The report raised serious questions about how the project was approved and whether or not injured service personnel had suffered any ill effects from the lack of recommended treatment.

The health and safety of our men and women in uniform – whether it is the body armor they wear, the design of vehicles to protect against improvised explosive devices, or the medical care they depend on – is a critical DoD priority that requires the utmost attention and support. That point is highlighted in a report we issued on body armor. Our audit found that since the Army was not testing the body armor in accordance to its own contract requirements, the Army could not reasonably ensure that vest components provide an appropriate level of protection for the warfighter.

The work of DoD IG includes providing necessary oversight on a variety of other potential hazards, including those not directly related to warfare, such as general health and safety issues at installations housing service personnel.

The death of Staff Sergeant Ryan D. Maseth, U.S. Army, is a case in point. On January 2, 2008, Staff Sgt. Maseth stepped into a shower at his private quarters in the Radwaniyah Palace Complex in Baghdad, Iraq, and was electrocuted upon touching a metal shower hose that was attached to an ungrounded water pump.

The U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command investigated the death and determined the death was accidental. However, the family of Staff Sgt. Maseth was not satisfied with the answers they received from the investigation. The family contacted their congressional representative, who sent a letter in February 2008 to then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates requesting fur-

ther investigation and that steps should be taken to prevent future incidents.

I travelled to Iraq to assess the situation and initiated other reports to determine whether there was a pattern to the electrocution deaths in Iraq and to assess electrical hazards in Afghanistan. We issued a series of three reports.

The first report reviewed the death of Staff Sgt. Maseth and found that his death was the catastrophic result of the failure of multiple systems and organizations that left Staff Sgt. Maseth and other U.S. service members exposed to unacceptable risk of injury or death. The second report reviewed the pattern of other electrocution deaths in Iraq.

The third report examined electrical safety in Afghanistan and found that the U.S. Central Command, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan and the Combined Joint Task Force were aware of the risks associated with the electrical infrastructure in Afghanistan. DoD IG put forth recommendations and the U.S. Central Command and the Combined Joint Task Force took steps to address those issues.

The death of Staff Sgt. Maseth touched off a series of inquiries resulting in not only corrective action taken in Iraq, but also in Afghanistan to ensure that potential electrical hazards were identified and addressed. What began as a “back end” report about an incident that occurred in Iraq resulted in a “front end” review that focused on preventing similar incidents in Afghanistan.

Although there is a discussion in the IG community of whether we should focus on “front end” audits to reduce future problems or on “back end” audits that can identify responsibility for malfeasance and result in prosecutions; clearly both are important.

Our criminal investigators also focus on protecting lives. Investigations that reveal potentially life-threatening circumstances are deemed top priorities. Accordingly, DCIS routinely investigates the introduction of failure-prone substandard products into the DoD procurement system; health care fraud involving providers that render inadequate or unnecessary care to service members; and the illegal diversion of sensitive DoD weapons and technologies to dangerous criminal or terrorist enterprises. For example, DCIS worked jointly with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration on an undercover operation known as “White Gun.” The operation identified three foreign nationals who attempted to purchase military grade weapons – including a stinger anti-aircraft missile – for use by drug cartels. The indi-

viduals also sought to obtain anti-tank weapons, grenade launchers, and high-caliber machine guns. The foreign nationals were arrested; two pled guilty in May 2011; and another was convicted on charges in connection with the undercover operation. Had investigators failed to intercede, it is likely sensitive military-grade weapons would have fallen into the hands of nefarious criminal elements.

Issuing Timely and Relevant Reports

There is an old military saying, “a good operational plan delivered before the battle is far better than a superior plan delivered after it’s over.” Within the IG community, conversation about timeliness and relevance is frequent and recognized as a major challenge. Oversight organizations, of course, want to do a good job and exhaust every possible avenue to get all the facts. However, if a report is issued after it is really needed, there is no value in terms of relevance.

We learned a hard lesson a few years ago about the difficulty of conducting oversight over two wars without an adequate permanent presence in-theater. We realized after attempting to provide oversight mostly in the continental United States that we must have personnel on the ground to be effective. We needed to be in country to maintain situational awareness; to talk with the commanders; to comprehend the challenges our troops face; and to be familiar with the difficulties of getting goods and services in theater. To support the Department, we have tripled the number of auditors, inspectors, and special agents on the ground in Southwest Asia. On any given day, there are between 50 and 60 personnel stationed in-theater performing a variety of oversight duties. In addition, there are also teams of DoD IG auditors, agents, inspectors, and engineers entering and exiting the region on temporary duty assignments to work on critical issues.

Additionally, I established a senior executive service-level special deputy inspector general for Southwest Asia, headquartered at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, to interact directly with military commanders in theater in order to ensure oversight is relevant and feedback is timely. That executive serves as the single point of contact for all matters relating to oversight activity in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait and other countries in the region. The special deputy also serves as the chairperson of the Southwest Asia Planning Group, which includes the inspectors general of the various military and civilian organizations serving in the region. In addition, the special deputy is in charge of coordinating the development of the Com-

prehensive Oversight Plan for Southwest Asia and Surrounding Areas. The plan addresses oversight work for Iraq and Afghanistan, and the rest of the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

Like most IGs, we receive many requests from Congress and the Department to conduct audits, investigations, and a broad range of assessments. Whether it is an assessment pertaining to a critical piece of warfighter equipment, the status of an allegation of senior official misconduct, or an evaluation of our train and equip mission in Afghanistan, the president, the secretary, and the Congress rely on our work to make critical decisions involving some of the most sensitive and complex matters facing our national security. If we aren't timely, we aren't relevant.



Occasionally, DoD senior leadership must immediately be made aware of critical issues that we identify during the course of our oversight work. In response to this requirement, we developed a tool to allow communication of crucial findings in an expedited manner. These “quick reaction memorandums” allow senior leaders to take immediate action rather than wait for a final report. For example, during a review of body armor, we issued a quick reaction memorandum to U.S. Air Forces Central, which took immediate action to ensure that all airmen have body armor that meets the required level of protection.

Although our goal is to ensure timeliness, some oversight projects will continue to require a significant investment of time given the complex nature of the subject matter. For example, a report issued in May 2011 subsequent to a prolonged audit identified millions of dollars in spare parts inventory that were not being used while new and identical parts were being purchased at a higher cost. We found \$339.7 million in existing DoD inventory that was not effectively used before procuring the same parts from Boeing, and over \$242.8 million in excess inventory that could have been used to satisfy

those requirements. What drew the most attention in this report were two examples of cost overcharging. Boeing charged the government \$644.75 for a “spur gear” that could have been obtained for \$12.51. After DoD IG auditors identified that discrepancy, Boeing refunded \$556,006. That same year, Boeing charged the government \$1,678.61 for a “roller assembly” slightly larger than a dime that could have been purchased through the Defense Logistics Agency for \$7.71. After auditors identified that discrepancy, Boeing refunded \$76,849.

To address timeliness and relevance, I also created an engagement board consisting of our top executives. Every proposed audit, assessment, evaluation, or inspection comes before the board for consideration. In each case, the board identifies the specific constituent associated with the issue, determines what is expected, and how soon the product or service is needed if our information is to be relevant on delivery. The board assesses the overall criticality of the work being proposed; whether to act; when the work is due; the consequences of being late; and the resources required to achieve success.

Taking Care of People and Communication

Along with protecting the health, safety, and welfare of our men and women in uniform, we make sure that taking care of our people is a top priority. People are our greatest resource and in order to ensure their success we must develop leaders, promote good communication, and ensure accountability.

When I arrived in July 2008, our training division had begun implementing in-house leadership courses. Since then, we have conducted workshops designed to reach all of our supervisors and managers, to include leadership courses for non-supervisory personnel, along with special seminars for our senior leaders. To date, more than 550 members of DoD IG have completed this training – accounting for over one quarter of our total work force. Senior leaders within our organization continue to be actively involved in each course as sponsors or speakers. Leadership needs to be taught, reinforced, and made a priority throughout any organization.

In May 2010, we held our first ever DoD IG-wide leadership training conference called “Fostering Excellence Through Unity,” which was attended by approximately 300 supervisors from across the organization – both domestic and overseas. Our goal was to promote leadership through a better understanding of the IG vision, to develop practical leadership skills and techniques, and to increase awareness of the expectations

of DoD IG stakeholders. The conference is now a yearly event. We held our second leadership conference in June of this year and our focus was on “Becoming a Model Oversight Organization.”

Enhancing communication is critical. It is impossible to be a model oversight organization if people are uncertain about what is expected of them. Clearly defined goals begin with good communication. I recently implemented a strategic communications program at DoD IG in order to develop a coordinated, proactive strategy to address our internal and external communications. The foundation of the program is an annual plan, which addresses our goals and objectives, key stakeholders, and strategies and tactics to communicate better about our work. We focus on increasing avenues for two-way communications with employees and encouraging employees to engage, identify problems, and develop solutions. For example, based on an employee suggestion – we now publish an e-newsletter, which we provide to our employees, congressional staff members, and senior leaders in the Department to share what we are doing, what reports are about to be released, and what projects we have recently announced.


I also encourage every leader at DoD IG to engage and interact with his or her staff. In support of that effort, I hold periodic, impromptu small group meetings with employees from our various components in order to hear their concerns and get their feedback. I believe that people are unlikely to follow leaders who do not communicate well.

Communication is even more important when you have employees located in field offices around the world, especially when working in war zones. That is why I, along with my senior leaders travel to various theaters of command to visit DoD IG personnel in Afghanistan, Iraq, Qatar, Kuwait, Germany, and Korea. It is important that we reach out, solicit feedback, and are available to listen.

While we are making sure that the lines of communication are open, it is also important that we ensure integrity and accountability. For example, shortly after I arrived at DoD IG in July 2008, one of my first initiatives was to create an office of ombudsman to provide DoD IG employees with an independent, impartial resource for informal and confidential dispute resolution. In addition, I established an Office of Professional Responsibility that reports directly to me and is charged with ensuring that all DoD IG employees are accountable; that we have policies in place; that they are current; and that they are being followed.

Conclusion

To become a model oversight organization, DoD IG must also become the organization of choice – the one our stakeholders unhesitatingly turn to when they need objective facts and candid assessments relating to DoD programs and operations. Successfully meeting the expectations of the Department, the Congress, and the American people consistently requires producing work products that are timely and relevant, and that address the health and safety of our troops, as well as ensuring the effectiveness and professionalism of our people.

Model organizations embrace change. Although we are an organization in transition, we are also most fortunate to have highly talented and dedicated people who embody the very best of public service. The credit for the many accomplishments highlighted in this article, and those accomplishments we will achieve in the future, goes directly to them – the hard working men and women of the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General. 



Gordon S. Heddell

Gordon S. Heddell was sworn in as the seventh inspector general for the Department of Defense on July 14, 2009, one year after being appointed as acting inspector general. Mr. Heddell has over ten years experience as a presidentially appointed, Senate confirmed inspector general, and has led inspector general offices of two cabinet level departments within the executive branch.

From 2001 to 2008, Mr. Heddell served as inspector general of the U.S. Department of Labor. Mr. Heddell served for 28 years in the U.S. Secret Service, where he held various management and leadership positions. Mr. Heddell began his government service as an Army chief warrant officer, helicopter pilot, serving in both Korea and Taiwan during the Vietnam-era conflict.

As inspector general, Mr. Heddell serves on the executive committee of the federal Council of Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency, and is chair of the Information Technology Committee.

Mr. Heddell holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Missouri, a master's degree in legal studies from the University of Illinois [formerly Sangamon State University], and was a Woodrow Wilson Public Service Fellow while at the Secret Service. He was the creator of the Secret Service mentoring program at two D.C. public schools.

