ARMY REGULATION 15-6

INVESTIGATION GUIDE

FOR

INFORMAL INVESTIGATIONS

JANUARY, 1997

INTRODUCTION

1. PURPOSE:

a. This guide is intended to assist investigating officers, who have been appointed under the provisions of Army Regulation (AR) 15-6, in conducting timely, thorough, and legally sufficient investigations. It is designed specifically for informal investigations, but some provisions are applicable to formal investigations. It may also be used by legal advisors responsible for advising investigating officers. A brief checklist is included at the end of the guide as an enclosure. The checklist is designed as a quick reference to be consulted during each stage of the investigation. The questions in the checklist will ensure that the investigating officer has covered all the basic elements necessary for a sound investigation.

b. This guide includes the changes implemented by Change 1 to AR 15-6. Many of those changes are significant; consequently, the information in the guide based on the changes is italicized.

2. DUTIES OF AN INVESTIGATING OFFICER: The primary duties of an investigating officer are:

a. to ascertain and consider the evidence on all sides of an issue,

b. to be thorough and impartial,

c. to make findings and recommendations warranted by the facts and comply with the instructions of the appointing authority, and

d. to report the findings and recommendations to the appointing authority.

3. AUTHORITY:

a. AR 15-6 sets forth procedures for the conduct of informal and formal investigations. <u>Only informal investigations will be discussed here</u>. Informal investigations are those that usually have a single investigating officer who conducts interviews and collects evidence. In contrast, formal investigations normally involve due process hearings for a designated respondent. Formal procedures are required whenever a respondent is designated.

b. Informal procedures are not intended to provide a hearing for persons who may have an interest in the subject of the investigation. Since no respondents are designated in informal procedures, no one is entitled to the rights of a respondent, such as notice of the proceedings, an opportunity to participate, representation by counsel, or the right to call and cross-examine witnesses. The investigating officer may, however, make any relevant findings or recommendations concerning individuals, even where those findings or recommendations are adverse to the individual or individuals concerned.

c. AR 15-6 is used as the basis for many investigations requiring the detailed gathering and analyzing of facts, and the making of recommendations based on those facts. AR 15-6 procedures may be used on their own, such as in an investigation to determine facts and circumstances, or the procedures may be incorporated by reference into directives governing specific types of investigations, such as reports of survey and line of duty investigations. If such directives contain guidance that is more specific than that set forth in AR 15-6 or these procedures, the more specific guidance will control. For example, AR 15-6 does not contain time limits for completion of investigations; however, if another directive that incorporates AR 15-6 procedures contains time limits, that requirement will apply.

d. Only commissioned officers, warrant officers, *or DA civilian employees paid under the General Schedule, Level 13 (GS 13), or above* may be investigating officers. The investigating officer must also be senior to any person that is part of the investigation if the investigation may require the investigating officer to make adverse findings or recommendations against that person. Since the results of any investigation may have a significant impact on policies, procedures, or careers of government personnel, *the appointing authority should select the best qualified person for the duty based on their education, training, experience, length of service, and temperament.*

PRELIMINARY MATTERS

1. Appointing authority.

a. Under AR 15-6, the following persons may appoint investigating officers for <u>informal</u> investigations:

- any general court-martial convening authority, including those who have such authority for administrative purposes only,

- any general officer,

- a commander at any level,

- a principal staff officer or supervisor in the grade of major or above,

- any state adjutant general, and

- *a DA civilian supervisor paid under the Executive Schedule, SES, or GS/GM 14 or above, provided the supervisor is the head of an agency or activity or the chief of a division or department.*

b. *Only a general court-martial convening authority may appoint an investigation for incidents resulting in property damage of $1,000,000, the loss or destruction of an Army aircraft or missile, an injury or illness resulting in, or likely to result in, total disability, or the death of one or more persons.*

2. Appointment procedures. Informal investigation appointments may be made orally or in writing. If written, the appointment orders are usually issued as a memorandum signed by the appointing authority or by a subordinate with the appropriate authority line. Whether oral or written, the appointment should specify clearly the purpose and scope of the investigation and the nature of the findings and recommendations required. If the orders are unclear, the investigating officer should seek clarification. The primary purpose of an investigation is to report on matters that the appointing authority has designated for inquiry. The appointment orders may also contain specific guidance from the appointing authority, which, even though not required by AR 15-6, nevertheless must be followed. For example, AR 15-6 does not require that witness statements be sworn for informal investigations; however, if the appointing authority requires this, all witness statements must be sworn.

3. Obtaining assistance. The servicing Judge Advocate office can provide assistance to an investigating officer at the beginning of and at any time during the investigation. Investigating officers should always seek legal advice as soon as possible after they are informed of this duty and as often as needed while conducting the investigation. In serious or complex investigations for which a legal review is mandatory, this requirement should be included in the appointment letter. Early coordination with the legal advisor will allow problems to be resolved before they are identified in the mandatory legal review. The legal advisor can assist an investigating officer in framing the issues, identifying the information required, planning the investigation, and interpreting and analyzing the information obtained. The attorney's role, however, is to provide legal advice and assistance, not to conduct the investigation or substitute his or her judgment for that of the investigating officer. NOTE: *Complex and sensitive cases include those involving a death or serious bodily injury, those in which findings and recommendations may result in adverse administrative action, and those that will be relied upon in actions by higher headquarters.*

4. Administrative matters. As soon as the investigating officer receives appointing orders, he or she should begin a chronology showing the date, time, and a short description of everything done in connection with the investigation. The chronology should begin with the date orders are received, whether verbal or written. Investigating officers should also record the reason for any unusual delays in processing the case, such as the absence of witnesses due to a field training exercise. The chronology should be part of the final case file.

5. Concurrent investigations. *An informal investigation may be conducted before, concurrently with, or after an investigation into the same or related matters by another command or agency. Appointing authorities and investigating officers must ensure that investigations do not hinder or interfere with criminal investigations or investigations directed by higher headquarters. In cases of concurrent investigations, investigating officers should coordinate with the other command or agency to avoid duplication of effort wherever possible.*

If available, the results of other investigations may be incorporated into the AR 15-6 investigation and considered by the investigating officer. Additionally, an investigating officer should immediately coordinate with the legal advisor if he or she discovers evidence of serious criminal misconduct.

CONDUCTING THE INVESTIGATION

1. Developing an investigative plan.

a. The investigating officer's primary duty is to gather evidence, and make findings of fact and appropriate recommendations to the appointing authority. Before obtaining information, however, the investigating officer should develop an investigative plan that consists of (1) an understanding of the facts required to reach a conclusion, and (2) a strategy for obtaining evidence. This should include a list of potential witnesses and a plan for when each witness will be interviewed. The order in which witnesses are interviewed may be important. An effective, efficient method is to interview principal witnesses last. This best prepares the investigating officer to ask all relevant questions and minimizes the need to re-interview these critical witnesses. As the investigation proceeds, it may be necessary to review and modify the investigative plan.

b. The investigating officer should begin the investigation by identifying the information already available, and determining what additional information will be required before findings and recommendations may be made to the appointing authority. An important part of this is establishing the appropriate standards, rules, or procedures that govern the circumstances under investigation. The legal advisor or other functional expert can assist the investigating officer in determining the information that will be required.

2. Obtaining documentary and physical evidence.

a. The investigating officer may need to collect documentary and physical evidence such as applicable regulations, existing witness statements, accident or police reports, and photographs. This information can save valuable time and effort. Accordingly, the investigating officer should obtain this information at the beginning of the investigation. In some cases, the information will not be readily available, so the request should be made early so the investigating officer may continue to work on other aspects of the investigation while the request is being processed. The investigating officer should, if possible and appropriate, personally inspect the location of the events being investigated and take photographs, if they will assist the appointing authority.

b. A recurring problem that must be avoided is lack of documentation in investigations with findings of no fault, no loss, or no wrongdoing. It is just as important to back these findings up with documentary evidence as it is to document adverse findings. All too frequently an investigating officer who makes a finding of no fault, no loss, or no wrongdoing, closes the investigation with little or no documentation. This is incorrect. The report of investigation must include sufficient documentation to convince the appointing authority and others who may review

the investigation that the finding of no fault, no loss, or no wrongdoing is supported by the evidence.

3. Obtaining witness testimony.

a. In most cases, witness testimony will be required. Clearly, the best interviews occur face-to-face; but, if necessary, interviews may be conducted by telephone or mail. Because of the preference for face-to-face interviews, telephone and mail interviews should be used only in unusual circumstances. Information obtained telephonically should be documented in a memorandum for record.

b. Witness statements should be taken on DA Form 2823. Legible handwritten statements and/or questions and answers are ordinarily sufficient. If the witness testimony involves technical terms that are not generally known outside the witness's field of expertise, the witness should be asked to define the terms the first time they are used.

c. Although AR 15-6 does not require that statements be sworn for informal investigations, the appointing authority, or other applicable regulation, may require sworn statements, or the investigating officer may, at his or her own discretion, ask for sworn statements, even where not specifically required. Under Article 136, UCMJ, military officers are authorized to administer the oath required to provide a sworn statement; 5 U.S.C. 303 provides this authority for civilian employees. (Statements taken out of the presence of the investigating officer may be sworn before an official authorized to administer oaths at the witness's location.)

d. Investigating officers do not have the authority to subpoena witnesses, and their authority to interview civilian employees may be subject to certain limitations. Prior to interviewing civilians, the investigating officer should discuss this matter with the local Labor Counselor. Commanders and supervisors, however, have the authority to order military personnel and to direct Federal employees to appear and testify. Civilian witnesses who are not Federal employees may agree to appear, and, if necessary, be issued invitational travel orders. This authority should be used only if the information cannot be otherwise obtained and only after coordinating with the legal advisor or appointing authority.

4. Rights Advisement.

a. All soldiers suspected of criminal misconduct must first be advised of their rights. DA Form 3881 should be used to record that the witness understands his or her rights and elects to waive those rights and make a statement. It may be necessary to provide the rights warning at the outset of the interview. In some cases, however, an investigating officer will become aware of the witness's involvement in criminal activity only after the interview has started and incriminating evidence is uncovered. In such case, rights warnings must be provided as soon as the investigating officer suspects that a witness may have been involved in criminal activity. If a witness elects to assert his or her rights and requests an attorney, all questioning must cease immediately. Questioning may only resume in the presence of the witness's attorney, if the witness consents to being interviewed.

b. Note that these rights apply only to information that might be used to incriminate the witness. They cannot be invoked to avoid questioning on matters that do not involve violations of criminal law. Finally, these rights may be asserted only by the individual who would be accused of the crime. The rights cannot be asserted to avoid incriminating other individuals. The following example highlights this distinction.

c. Example: A witness who is suspected of stealing government property must be advised of his or her rights prior to being interviewed. However, if a witness merely is being interviewed concerning lost or destroyed government property in connection with a Report of Survey, a rights warning would not be necessary unless evidence is developed that leads the investigating officer to believe the individual has committed a criminal offense. If it is clear that the witness did not steal the property but has information about who did, the witness may not assert rights on behalf of the other individual.

5. Scheduling witness interviews. The investigating officer will need to determine which witnesses should be interviewed and in what order. Often, information provided by one witness can raise issues that should be discussed with another. Organizing the witness interviews will save time and effort that would otherwise be spent "backtracking" to re-interview prior witnesses concerning information provided by subsequent witnesses. While re-interviewing may be unavoidable in some circumstances, it should be kept to a minimum. The following suggests an approach to organizing witness interviews; it is not mandatory.

- When planning who to interview, work from the center of the issue outward. Identify the people who are likely to provide the best information. When conducting the interviews, start with witnesses that will provide all relevant background information and frame the issues. This will allow the interviews of key witnesses to be as complete as possible, avoiding the "backtracking" described above.

- Concentrate on those witnesses who would have the most direct knowledge about the events in question. Without unnecessarily disclosing the evidence obtained, attempt to seek information that would support or refute information already obtained from others. In closing an interview, it is appropriate to ask if the witness knows of any other persons who might have useful information or any other information the witness believes may be relevant to the inquiry.

- Any information that is relevant should be collected regardless of the source; however, investigating officers should collect the best information available from the most direct source.

- It may be necessary or advisable to interview experts having specialized understanding of the subject matter of the investigation.

- At some point, there will be no more witnesses available with relevant and useful information. It is not necessary to interview every member of a unit, for example, if only a few people have information relevant to the inquiry. Also, all relevant witnesses do not need to be interviewed if the facts are clearly established and not in dispute. However, the investigating

officer must be careful not to prematurely terminate an investigation because a few witnesses give consistent testimony.

6. Conducting witness interviews. Before conducting witness interviews, investigating officers may consult Inspector General officials or law enforcement personnel such as Military!Police officers or Criminal Investigation Division agents for guidance on interview techniques. The following suggestions may be helpful:

- Prepare for the interview. While there is no need to develop scripts for the witness interviews, investigating officers may wish to review the information required and prepare a list of questions or key issues to be covered. This will prevent the investigating officer from missing issues and will maximize the use of the officer's and witness's time. Generally, it is helpful to begin with open-ended questions such as "Can you tell me what happened?" After a general outline of events is developed, follow up with narrow, probing questions, such as "Did you see SGT X leave the bar before or after SGT Y?" Weaknesses or inconsistencies in testimony can generally be better explored once the general sequence of events has been provided.

- Ensure the witness's privacy. Investigating officers should conduct the interview in a place that will be free from interruptions and will permit the witness to speak candidly without fear of being overheard. Witnesses should not be subjected to improper questions, unnecessarily harsh and insulting treatment, or unnecessary inquiry into private affairs.

- Focus on relevant information. Unless precluded for some reason, the investigating officer should begin the interview by telling the witness about the subject matter of the investigation. Generally, any evidence that is relevant and useful to the investigation is permissible. The investigating officer should not permit the witness to get off track on other issues, no matter how important the subject may be to the witness. Information should be material and relevant to the matter being investigated. Relevancy depends on the circumstances in each case. Compare the following examples:

Example 1: In an investigation of a loss of government property, the witness's opinions concerning the company commander's leadership style normally would not be relevant.

Example 2: In an investigation of alleged sexual harassment in the unit, information on the commander's leadership style might be relevant.

Example 3: In an investigation of allegations that a commander has abused command authority, the witness's observation of the commander's leadership style would be highly relevant.

- Let the witness testify in his or her own words. Investigating officers must avoid coaching the witness or suggesting the existence or non-existence of material facts. After the testimony is completed, the investigating officer should assist the witness in preparing a written statement that includes all relevant information, and presents the testimony in a clear and logical fashion. Written testimony also should reflect the witness's own words and be natural. Stilted

"police blotter" language is not helpful and detracts from the substance of the testimony. A tape recorder may be used, but the witness should be advised of its use. Additionally, the tape should be safeguarded, even after the investigation is completed.

- Protect the interview process. In appropriate cases, an investigating officer may direct witnesses not to discuss their statement or testimony with other witnesses or with persons who have no official interest in the proceedings until the investigation is complete. This precaution is recommended to eliminate possible influence on testimony of witnesses still to be heard. Witnesses, however, are not precluded from discussing matters with counsel.

7. Rules of Evidence: Because an AR 15-6 investigation is an administrative and not a judicial action, the rules of evidence normally used in court proceedings do not apply. Therefore, the evidence that may be used is limited by only a few rules.

- The information must be relevant and material to the matter or matters under investigation.

- Information obtained in violation of an individual's Article 31, UCMJ, or 5th Amendment rights may be used in administrative proceedings unless obtained by unlawful coercion or inducement likely to affect the truthfulness of the statement.

- The result of polygraph examinations may be used only with the subject's permission.

- Privileged communications between husband and wife, priest and penitent, attorney and client may not be considered, and present or former inspector general personnel will not be required to disclose the contents of inspector general reports, investigations, inspections, action requests, or other memoranda without appropriate approval.

- "Off-the-record" statements are not acceptable.

- An involuntary statement by a member of the Armed Forces regarding the origin, incurrence, or aggravation of a disease or injury may not be admitted.

The investigating officer should consult the legal advisor if he or she has any questions concerning the applicability of any of these rules.

8. Standard of Proof. Since an investigation is not a criminal proceeding, there is no requirement that facts and findings be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Instead, unless another specific directive states otherwise, AR 15-6 provides that findings must be supported by "a greater weight of evidence than supports a contrary conclusion." That is, findings should be based on evidence which, after considering all evidence presented, points to a particular conclusion as being more credible and probable than any other conclusion.

CONCLUDING THE INVESTIGATION

1. Preparing Findings and Recommendations. After all the evidence is collected, the investigating officer must review it and make findings. The investigating officer should consider the evidence thoroughly and impartially, and make findings of fact and recommendations that are supported by the facts and comply with the instructions of the appointing authority.

- Facts: To the extent possible, the investigating officer should fix dates, places, persons, and events, definitely and accurately. The investigating officer should be able to answer questions such as: What occurred? When did it occur? How did it occur? Who was involved, and to what extent? Exact descriptions and values of any property at issue in the investigation should be provided.

- Findings: A finding is a clear and concise statement that can be deduced from the evidence in the record. In developing findings, investigating officers are permitted to rely on the facts and any reasonable inferences that may be drawn from those facts. In stating findings, investigating officers should refer to the exhibit or exhibits relied upon in making each finding. Findings (including findings of no fault, no loss, or no wrongdoing) must be supported by the documented evidence that will become part of the report. Exhibits should be numbered in the order they are discussed in the findings.

- Recommendations: Recommendations should take the form of proposed courses of action consistent with the findings, such as disciplinary action, imposition of financial liability, or corrective action. Recommendations must be supported by the facts and consistent with the findings. Each recommendation should cite the specific findings that support the recommendation.

2. Preparing the Submission to the Appointing Authority. After developing the findings and recommendations, the investigating officer should complete DA Form 1574 and assemble the packet in the following order:

- appointing order,

- initial information collected,

- rights warning statements,

- chronology, and

- exhibits (with an index).

3. LEGAL REVIEW:

a. AR 15-6 does not require that all informal investigations receive legal review. *The appointing authority, however, must get a legal review of all cases involving serious or complex*

matters, such as where the incident being investigated has resulted in death or serious bodily injury, or where the findings and recommendations may result in adverse administrative action, or will be relied on in actions by higher headquarters. Nonetheless, appointing authorities are encouraged to obtain legal review of all investigations. Other specific directives may also require a legal review. Generally, the legal review will determine:

- whether the investigation complies with requirements in the appointing order and other legal requirements,

- the effects of any errors in the investigation,

- whether the findings (including findings of no fault, no loss, or no wrongdoing) and recommendations are supported by sufficient evidence, and

- whether the recommendations are consistent with the findings.

b. If a legal review is requested or required, it is required before the appointing authority approves the findings and recommendations. After receiving a completed AR 15-6 investigation, the appointing authority may approve, disapprove, or modify the findings and recommendations, or may direct further action, such as the taking of additional evidence, or making additional findings.

CHECKLIST FOR INVESTIGATING OFFICERS

1. Preliminary Matters:

a. Has the appointing authority appointed an appropriate investigating officer based on seniority, availability, experience, and expertise?

b. Does the appointment memorandum clearly state the purpose and scope of the investigation, the points of contact for assistance (if appropriate), and the nature of the findings and recommendations required?

c. Has the initial legal briefing been accomplished?

2. Investigative Plan.

a. Does the investigative plan outline the background information that must be gathered, identify the witnesses who must be interviewed, and order the interviews in the most effective manner?

b. Does the plan identify witnesses no longer in the command and address alternative ways of interviewing them?

c. Does the plan identify information not immediately available and outline steps to quickly obtain the information?

3. Conducting the Investigation.

a. Is the chronology being maintained in sufficient detail to identify causes for unusual delays?

b. Is the information collected (witness statements, MFR's of phone conversations, photographs, etc.) being retained and organized?

c. Is routine coordination with the legal advisor being accomplished?

4. Preparing Findings and Recommendations.

a. Is the evidence assembled in a logical and coherent fashion?

b. Are the findings (including findings of no fault, no loss, or no wrongdoing) supported by the evidence? Does each finding cite the exhibits that support it?

c. Are the recommendations supported by the findings? Does each recommendation cite the findings that support it?

d. Are the findings and recommendations responsive to the tasking in the appointment memorandum?

e. Did the investigation address all the issues (including systemic breakdowns; failures in supervision, oversight, or leadership; program weaknesses; accountability for errors; and other relevant areas of inquiry) raised directly or indirectly by the appointment?

5. Final Action.

a. Was an appropriate legal review conducted?

b. Did the appointing authority approve the findings and recommendations? If not, have appropriate amendments been made and approved?

c. Have the necessary taskers been prepared to implement the recommendations?