Signal Tips For Division Communicators

or

"How To Be A Successful Division Signal Battalion Commander"

by LTC Jerry H. Hogan

Several years ago a very popular book on the newstand was entitled "What You Always Wanted to Know About Sex. . .But Were Afraid to Ask." This book addressed all the questions about sex that one wanted answered, but didn't know whom to ask. Another equally successful book for signal officers would have been "How to be a Successful Division Signal Battalion Commander. . .But Nobody Ever Told Me."

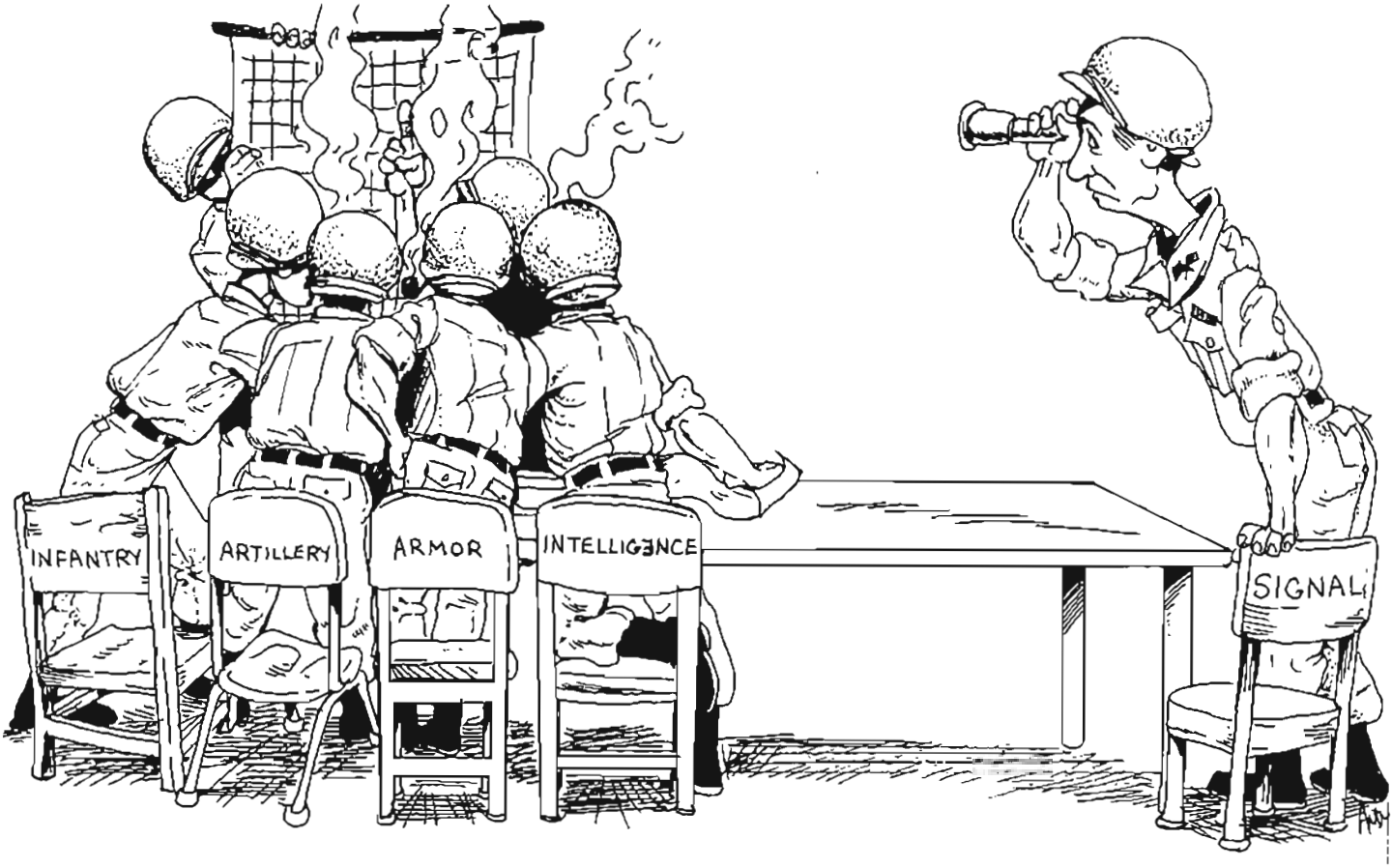
Unfortunately, this last book was not written. And, when most Signal battalion commanders take over their command, they find questions that are not answered in FMs and TMs. Additionally, they find that, in many cases, the standard doctrine simply will not work. The successful battalion commander, through a lot of luck and the help of some good officers in his battalion, can manage over a period of time to find out the things that are important and the things that can be set aside for someone else to handle. This, however, is a very hard way to learn, and sometimes the time is not available to allow one the luxury of finding out through hit or miss the best way of doing something.

Condensed in the few pages of this article are the nine signal tips that enabled me to command what many have called the best division signal battalion in the Army. A word of caution, however. These are just signal tips—they are not command tips. Command is a totally different subject which will not be addressed. These are simply the helpful hints which will enable you to do the technical part of your job in a division, thereby allowing additional time for the command of your battalion.

Another word of caution: not all division signal battalion commanders will agree on what is recommended here. Like the motto of the 8th Infantry Division, however, THESE ARE MY CREDENTIALS and they enabled my battalion over a 2-year period to provide continuous, reliable communications to two division commanders, through two major free-play exercises including one REFORGER and then countless division FTXs and CPXs. They work.

Put Your Emphasis On VHF The division fielded on the battlefield today cannot rely upon radio teletypewriter and FM secure voice to fight a battle. The commander must rely on a combination of his VHF Multichannel and FM secure voice assets to command and control the division. FM secure voice is great during the attack and exploitation; but in the active defense or the delay, FM voice is so susceptible to EW-type actions that a division commander cannot depend upon this means to accumulate the mass of data which he must have to control and influence the battle. The means of doing this is provided with the division multichannel or VHF system. All of your advice to the division commander must continually be focused on ensuring that CPs are picked so that VHF communications can be established on the battlefield with a minimum of relays.

Do Away With PCM Cable Completely Within the TOE of the division signal battalion, you will find about 80 miles of PCM video cable authorized. You will also find eight five-man cable teams authorized in one of the companies to install an extensive cable system. Forget it! Don't even attempt to lay PCM cable. First, your division will move too fast for you to be able to lay and recover cable at a division main or brigade CP location. When one of these headquarters pulls into an area, immediate communications must be established. You simply won't have the time to fool around with cable in the time frame you must work. Second, with all but the light infantry divisions, most of our maneuver battalions now are heavily laden with tracked vehicles. Your cable won't last. The tracks will just cut it to pieces. Forget about running cable from the top of a hill down to a CP located in a town! If you must separate your signal elements from a headquarters in a town location, connect



them with a VHF system. It is faster, more reliable, and it will work.

Don't Run SB-22 Switchboards For The DTOC Many divisions run a separate switchboard for the division tactical operations center (DTOC). This switchboard eliminates the need for numerous point-to-point telephones in the DTOC itself and is a better utilization of communications resources. However, the error is made when some divisions try to terminate these circuits on stacked SB-22 switchboards instead of using their organic battalion MTC-7 or SB 3082. In the 8th Division we run a secure 50-line AN/TCC-35 (SB-3082 switchboard). The service is quick and reliable. On the other hand, I have seen other divisions in Europe try to service the DTOC with four stacked SB-22s in a makeshift M109 van or salvage yard shelter picked up for this special purpose. The service is lousy and the quality of communications is degraded. It is a disaster ready to happen.

Keep The Lieutenants Where The Action Is Within the TOE for the division signal battalion, each platoon in the forward communications company (Company B) is organized to support one brigade. FM 11-50 shows this platoon supporting the brigade by providing a forward area signal center in the vicinity of each brigade trains and multichannel terminals at the brigade headquarters. With this use, the biggest concentration of personnel and equipment is at the FASC. Therefore, by logic, the platoon leader should be at this location. This is wrong! The action in the division takes place at the brigade headquarters, not the trains. The signal platoon leader must be with the brigade commander so that reliable communications can be provided to this man. In the 8th Division, we provide VHF multichannel systems to three locations of the brigade—the brigade trains area, the brigade main CP, and the brigade TAC CP. The platoon sergeant of the signal platoon goes to the FASC. The platoon leader goes originally with the brigade main. When the brigade commander leaves his main to establish the TAC, that is where the lieutenant goes with his VHF team. Then the lieutenant moves with the commander as he goes back and forth between his main and TAC. This is a proven concept that works.

Find Yourself The Best 31M In Your Battalion And Put Him At The Battalion SYSCON The very first point for successful communications in the division is to put your emphasis on VHF. To do this, however, you must have an expert in all aspects of VHF located in the systems control (SYSCON) of the signal battalion. This man must be the one who does all systems design, all system changes, all frequency planning, and all frequency changes. Your S3 can't do this. He is too busy with other things. You have got to pull the best man that you can find in the battalion and place him in this unauthorized position. He will guarantee you

success. Without this man, I will guarantee you failure.

Put The ADSO In The DTOC The signal battalion commander is also the division signal officer. He has as his direct assistants on the division staff a major, assistant division signal officer; a captain, radio officer; and a lieutenant, wire officer. Some divisions place these officers in the role of statisticians located adjacent to the signal battalion and separate from the DTOC. Their role is to keep track of, on an after-the-fact basis, the status of various means of communications within the division. This is misuse of great talent. The ADSO and his two officers must be in the DTOC where the action is. In the 8th Division the DSO and his staff work out of the G3 TOC van. Their function is to head off problems before they develop. Examples are VHF system or circuit outages from the DTOC to deployed units and difficulties on the FM command net. There should be a direct line from the ADSO in the DTOC to the SYSCON. Problems then are passed to the battalion SYSCON from the ADSO and in many cases can be corrected before the division staff ever knows a problem existed. And that is the way it should be.

Establish Standards Through Team Testing ARTEP 11-50 for the division signal battalion spells out in detail what each team within the signal battalion should be capable of doing. In most cases, these standards are not particularly stringent and you will find that the time frame in which the tasks are to be performed can be exceeded. But the point is to train your teams to meet or exceed the ARTEP standards. Test your teams to measure up to these standards at least semiannually. Have team competition during testing, so that the teams are taking the same type of written and practical examination; this will determine which team in the unit is the best in each MOS. It builds spirit and it increases the training value. As an example of what you can achieve with this type training, the VHF teams that support the brigades within the 8th division are trained so that they can arrive on location during displacement of a brigade headquarters and re-establish VHF communications within 5 minutes to the division main CP. You will not be able to do this unless you train your teams on a continuous basis to this type of a standard.

Install The Division Communications System One Day Each Week To ARTEP Standards This is a tough one. There will be many reasons cited why you cannot deploy your battalion each week and establish the division communications system, e.g., maneuver room, lack of funding, post details, other mandatory training, etc. Be absolutely tenacious, though, and ignore all the reasons why you can't do it. Presently, the 8th Signal Battalion can deploy to the local division area in western Germany and establish the complete division communications system, to include VHF to each brigade main, TAC, and trains area, in less than 4 hours. This includes travel time from the battalion home station to the outlying brigades, which ranges from 1 hour to 2½ hours. This capability, however, was not arrived at easily. For the past 21 months, this battalion has gone to the field at least once each week when in garrison and not deployed on a division or higher CPX or FTX. As I said, there were numerous reasons why we couldn't do it, but we did it and it paid off!

Operations Should Have Centralized Planning And Control And Decentralized Execution This is a classic statement like "Motherhood, the Flag, and Apple Pie." However, it must be the basic precept from which you operate. Planning must be controlled at the battalion level. Here, systems planning and all frequency planning must be done by the SYSCON. Any change to plans, frequencies, or operations must be directed by the SYSCON. Changes cannot originate at the platoon level and then simply be passed to battalion for recording. It will not work! On the other hand, execution of plans must be completely decentralized. Platoon leaders must be responsible for providing all aspects of communications to the headquarters they support. They cannot wait to be told about displacements and what they should do when a brigade displaces. They must have the confidence that the battalion will support their actions and they must realize that their primary mission is to provide communications. They must be allowed to make the decision at their level and this enables them to accomplish this job. If they don't, you won't succeed.

As you can see, the tips in this article are pragmatic. I have personally found them successful. Some literature has been written that states a signal battalion commander will get in trouble more quickly because of errors in command rather than errors in providing communications to the division. I do not subscribe to this theory. If you can provide reliable communications to the division commander, you are doing your job and your command will be easier because you will have the full support of the leadership of the division. If, on the other hand, the communications support you provide the division is poor, you have two strikes against you before you even start.

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