

Three questions every new S-6 should ask



By MAJ Michael S. Ryan

Congratulations, you are now a brand new S-6 in a brigade combat team maneuver, engineer, support, or fires battalion. Now what? How do you begin shaping the mission command and signal systems to best support your battalion?

The first step is of course to read the outstanding continuity book left to you by your predecessor and to review the Signal equipment and Mission Command systems organic to your unit.

Whether your predecessor left you a continuity book or not, you still need to ask three fundamental questions to begin to understand how your section supports the battalion and companies in your unit.

Asking, and understanding the answers to, these three questions will help you understand your unit and anticipate their Signal and mission command needs.

Failing to ask and understand these questions will leave you in a more reactionary mode which is not good for you or your unit.

You will need to ask these questions of each commander, staff section, and specialty

platoon in your unit. You need to gather as much information from as many sources as possible to garner a greater understanding of the complexities of communications within your formation.

By understanding these complexities, you will be able to predict during the Military Decision Making Process possible areas of friction in the concept of Signal support you develop for each of the planning courses of action and provide intelligent, executable risk analysis and mitigations. Here are the questions you need to ask.

1. What do you do?

The object of this question is not to try to become a subject matter expert on each section and company. The answer to this question allows you to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of mission sets and tasks faced by your BN. What does an infantry company do? It closes with and destroys the enemy. But is that all that it does? Doesn't an infantry company also scout, defend, cordon and search, conduct wide

area security operations, and check point operations? Doesn't it also provide aid to civil support, provide disaster relief, support key leader engagements with indigenous populations, attend to media relations, and a whole host of other tasks, missions and operations outside the scope of close with and destroy?

How about the intelligence section of an engineer BN or the fire direction center in a fires battalion?

A great tool to help you understand what each section and team does is to look at the units Mission Essential Task List. This list of standardized tasks and sub-tasks will help you understand for what missions your unit is preparing. By comparing the METL and the commander's training priorities you gain an insight into what your unit is expected to do and you can begin formulating options to support those missions.

2. How do you do it?

In the first question you are seeking an understanding of the mission sets that your unit faces. With this second question, you

are seeking to understand how your unit accomplishes those mission sets. How do scouts actually go out and scout? When a mechanized infantry company does a cordon and search, how do they go about it and how does the personal section go about processing a request for replacement Soldiers?

Again, you are not seeking to be an expert in how your sections, teams and companies actually do what they do. You are seeking to understand the fundamentals of how your unit goes about its tasks to begin to develop COAs to predict support requirements and provide the best communications.

3. Who do you need to talk to?

Ultimately you will arrive at this final question and a corollating question of what information do you need to convey?

It is important when asking this question that you not focus on specific systems and equipment. What you are trying to understand from your sections and teams is the nature of the communications that they need to have and with whom

they need it. Does your scout platoon need to just be able to talk or do they need to be able to send digital reports? If they need digital reports, what kind of reports to they need to send. Who do they need to talk to or send these reports to? By understanding the nature and types of information that the scouts need to convey, you can assess what is the best system or method within your unit's organic capabilities to support your scouts. This is true for each of the sections and teams within the BN.

Conclusion

Some of this may be intuitive just based on a cursory knowledge of how the Army in general is designed to function.

However, you may be surprised by some of the requirements that you begin to identify by asking these questions. S-6's today operate in one of the most technologically complex military environments in history.

With emerging technologies on the horizon and advances in battlefield communications we can expect even more

complexity. It is therefore important for the new S-6 to understand what his unit does and how they do it at a fundamental level.

The S-6 must also understand what information and communications are required to accomplish those missions. Without this knowledge, the S-6 cannot shape his unit's signal support to optimize available assets, conserve resources, and enable mission accomplishment.

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ACRONYM QuickScan

BN – Battalion
CO – Company
COA – Course of Action
MC – Mission Command
MDMP – Military Decision Making Process

METL – Mission Essential Task List
S-6 – Staff Communications Officer