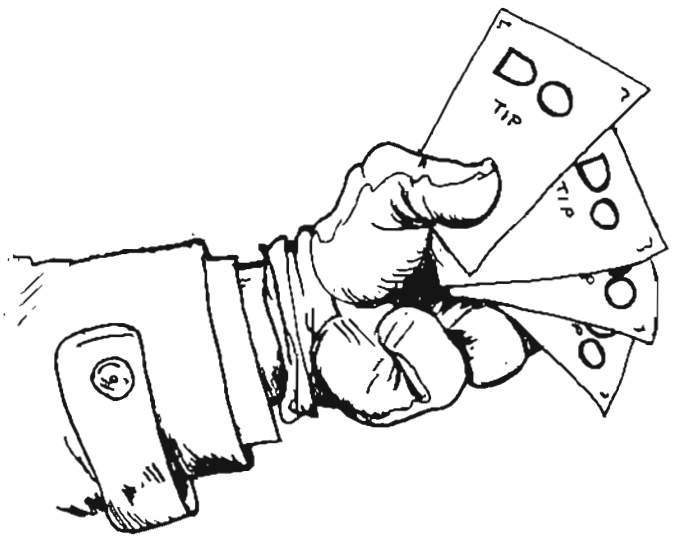
Training TIPS for Signal S-3s

by MAJ J.G. Swedlund

The recent publication of Training Circular (TC) 21-5-7 marks a departure from traditional Army training methodology which will impact greatly on the prospective S3. It requires a whole change in philosophy as well as technique.

While assigned as S3 of the 8th Division Signal Battalion in Europe, I had the opportunity to use the new circular in draft form as a guide for building a comprehensive training program. Based on my experiences, I'd like to throw out some "dos" and "don'ts." Keep in mind that the TC says it all very well, that it appears especially useful for Signal training applications, and that I surely don't have all the answers, just some pride and prejudices.



Some "Dos"

First of all, read and understand TC 21-5-7 completely, and know your place in the systems approach to training.

- **Define your tasks, conditions and standards (TCS).**

They are probably more extensive than the table of organization and equipment (TOE) mission statement. Define them for your situation. In Europe, the tasks meant 100 per cent load-up of TOE equipment and supplies, movement to the general defense plan (GDP) area, installation of communications according to the division's GDP, and preparation for displacement. Thorough analysis of these tasks as training modules gave us new insight about our real training needs.

Out of this we developed "battle books," similar to the Infantry's, which would permit a team to move forward alone to accomplish its mission in a confused wartime environment. Until you have written the TCS for time-phased loading of ammo; repair parts; petroleum, oils and lubricants; chemical gear; rations; and individual equipment within the time constraints of your supported unit's mission and the space constraints of your compound, you don't really understand your mission.

- **Publish a master training plan.**

TC 21-5-7 covers this well. We used a battalion training circular as a vehicle. It contained statements of battalion and company objectives integrated within all phases of training, operations, maintenance and personnel management. We also published the modified Army Training and Evaluation Program (ARTEP) for each MOS/team and much like TC 21-5-7 shows, our yearly schedule of proposed training. Subsequently, we

published a calendar for each month—progressively filled in with greater detail.

Provide a copy of the master training plan for each officer and senior NCO in the battalion: it's worth it; it's imperative. This becomes the basis for your working file, which TC 21-5-7 describes.

- **Aim your training at the team level.**

NCOs run teams; they are the primary trainers. You should provide the NCO with the major resources of time, supplies and his team members. Train him to train, insist that he be a good trainer and let him get on with it.

Don't make the mistake of trying to manage individual training. You'll only end up in the classroom rut. Insure that every trooper has a Soldier's Manual and let the NCO insure that he uses it. Many of the most important tasks for Signal troops are team oriented, e.g., antenna erection, and well-trained teams will accomplish the mission. Integrate training at the Signal site/platoon/center level through your senior NCOs and officers during field exercises.

- **Individual training is NCO business.**

This is a corollary of the last tenet. Your battalion command sergeant major should run the individual training program to insure a well-trained trooper at SQT time and an asset for his team. The CSM and I worked very closely on this. He was in charge of two two-hour blocks of time each week. That time was sacrosanct. He used it as he liked, but usually it was time spent on individual training, face-to-face work, NCO to trooper. Using their job books, senior NCOs helped the younger NCOs on training methods, approaches and techniques.

You'll be gratified to see how well NCOs can run things. We entrusted many operations to our NCOs without officer supervision. Convoys, rifle ranges, map courses (with vehicles), and one-day field exercises that were run entirely by the NCOs often were better than with officers. Senior NCOs have a better environment to train younger soldiers when they are fully in charge.

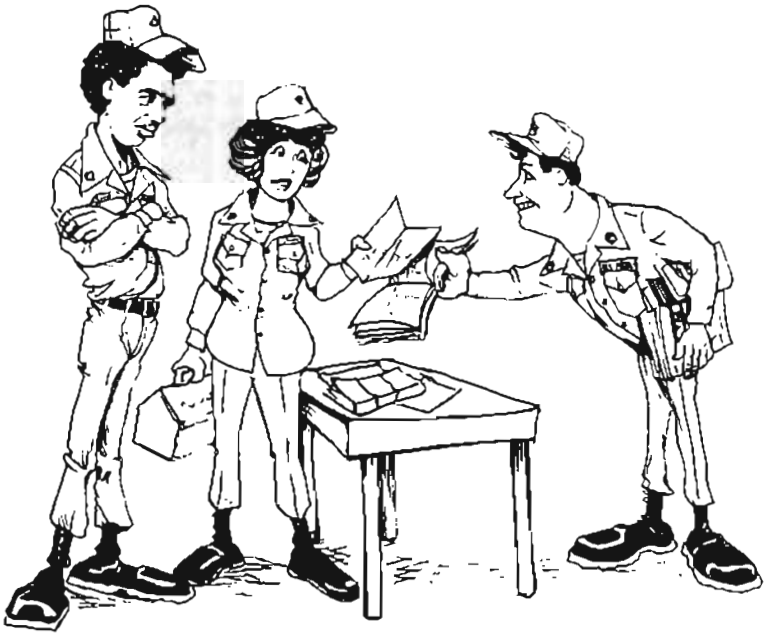
At battalion level, we received only a report on the number of tasks that were "GO," "NO GO," or "NOT TESTED" according to MOS within each company. Hence, this feedback provided the CSM and me with input to plan the evaluation schedule for the coming month or quarter.

- **Evaluate, evaluate well and evaluate often.**

The S3 manages evaluations. It's his most important task. With good evaluation, you will motivate your unit, you will provide a sound basis for analysis, and you will be able to allocate resources reasonably. This function will draw down on the best people in your unit, but you have to commit those resources and manage them well.

As an example of how to stimulate individual training, we drew NCOs from the companies and conducted random evaluations of one or two tasks for each MOS during that company's team-training time blocks. We had announced which tasks would be tested a week earlier. We briefed the evaluators, who were different each week. And keep in mind that being an evaluator and being evaluated are also forms of training.

After checking through all the tasks in the Soldier's Manuals, the CSM analyzed the job books to see which tasks needed more work. We then announced a special evaluation of those tasks two weeks hence and used S3 NCOs as evaluators. We evaluated as many troopers



Individual training is NCO business

(more than 50 per cent in each MOS in each company) as time permitted. The results were encouraging.

Innovate, use your imagination and make evaluation interesting, yet as objective as possible. This is a difficult task for you, the S3, but it's the *sine qua non* of your training program.

Each fall and spring we evaluated teams in an intensive two-week period called "team testing," for lack of a more original name. We had produced a task, conditions, and standards sheet for each type team in the battalion based on the ARTEP modified to our environment. We also had special TCS which we developed for maintenance, supply economy, safety, etc. Each team trained with these TCS throughout the year.

During team testing, we ran one-station evaluation of soldiers' common tasks and the special TCS, and tested the teams' ability to perform their missions according to the modified ARTEP. We then totaled the "GOs" and "NO GOs" for each team with the individual scores to help us judge a team combat ready. Consolidating individual test scores with the team total gave the team chief a real stake in individual training. Teams which did not achieve an overall "GO" for team testing were re-evaluated until they succeeded.

As you can see, to do all of this in a professional manner takes time and resources, but it's your training mission. This is the way to aim your training at the team level.

- **Integrate battalion training often.**

Use multi-echelon training to test your officers and senior NCOs. We deployed the entire battalion to the local training area one day each week to establish the division commo system. The battalion systems control runs the show and insists on excellent performance. Here is where we worked out control and coordination problems, practiced resupply tasks and familiarized teams with their place in the battalion's mission scheme.

Insist on high standards. You are conditioning the teams to the real thing. Once a team, a site and a signal

center are set up and operational, training should still go on. NCOs should provide hands-on training for those things which cannot be done in garrison. Overheading cable, camouflaging, setting up generators, laying out perimeter defenses, are among the many other tasks which teams can work on after initially establishing communications.

Some "Don'ts"

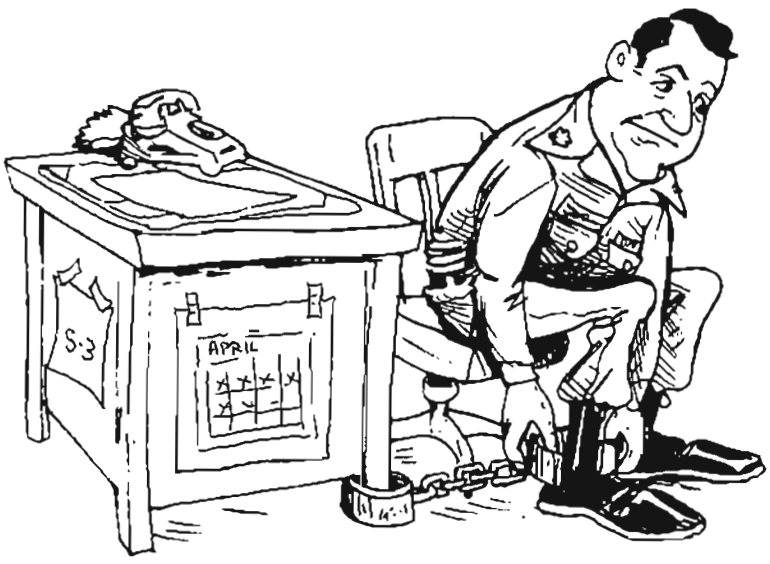
When you get the urge to get out of the office to check training, "stifle it." Instead, plan a fresh approach to evaluate a task, then check that evaluation.

Don't "mother hen" company commanders and first sergeants about their training schedule and how they accomplish the training mission.

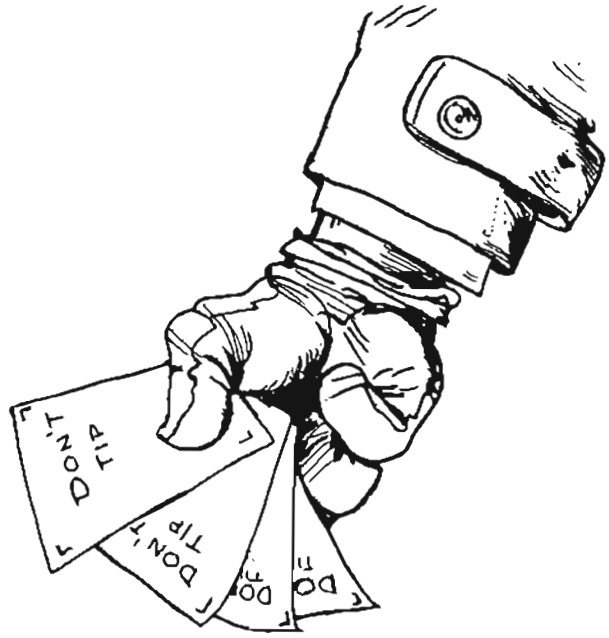
Don't "mess with" the CSM's business of soldier training. Don't get "by name specific" in job book evaluation. You'll need some statistics from the companies but get them through the CSM and the first sergeants.

Don't expect your officers and NCOs to read TC 21-5-7 and understand your program. *Train these trainers yourself.* Their roles have changed, too; tell them all how they fit into your program. Communicate, keep them informed.

Don't forget to inform the battalion commander. I had great latitude with my program as long as he was informed. He, the executive officer and you will define the objectives of your training program; keep him informed of accomplishments.



Stifle the urge to get out of the office



Don't let your training master plan become a guide to cyclical training. As I said, integrate training often with multi-echelon exercises.

Don't publish detailed company training schedules. This stifles initiative and you can't control 150-plus personnel with one schedule, anyway. Platoon leaders and NCOs draft their own work-training plans on a weekly and daily basis within the framework of the company schedule. Block out periods of two to eight hours for team training, maintenance, NCO professionalism and note special events. You insure productive use of time through evaluation, not by checking classrooms.

Don't train in classrooms. Let the NCO have his men in the vans, on the ranges, in the motor pools. Let them break instruction into 15 and 20 minute mini-lectures. Test for results.

Innovate and experiment with your training. These are not the only gems of wisdom that you'll need when you step into that "three-slot," but they may help you translate new concepts to action.

MAJ J. G. Swedlund, who is currently assigned as technical operations officer in the Personnel Information Systems Directorate of MILPERCEN in Alexandria, VA, recently completed a four-year tour with the 8th Infantry Division and 8th Signal Battalion in Europe where he was battalion executive officer, assistant division Signal officer and battalion S3, successively. He has commanded Signal companies in Vietnam and with the 82nd Airborne Division. Holding an MS degree from George Washington University, MAJ Swedlund is a graduate of the Command and General Staff College.