A new officer primer

by 1st Lt. Michael J. Molohon

Inevitably, newly commissioned Signal Corps officers are exposed to the world of tactical communications in a Forward Area Signal Center (FASC) Platoon in a division signal battalion. One of the main reasons this is so is the independence of a FASC platoon's employment in a tactical environment. A FASC platoon contains all the communications means found in other signal platoons: multichannel, radio-teletypewriter, FM radio, comm center and cable. A FASC platoon is normally able to support a brigade without augmentation from other units within the signal battalion, and it is organized specifically to support the maneuver brigade.

Much of the Army's deployment training is tailored to brigade task forces. Desert training at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, CA, and cold weather training at Fort Drum, NY, are just two examples of such exercises. With the emphasis on such training, there is a strong possibility that you as a FASC platoon leader will have to prepare, deploy and recover from such a major training exercise. The purpose of this article, then, is to assist you as you prepare your unit for deployment. Although what follows discusses the deployment of a FASC platoon to the NTC, much of the planning sequence and lessons learned applies to all deployments and to all units regardless of sizes.

The ultimate success of the platoon's mission depends on the readiness of its equipment, all of which must be in top operating condition before deployment.

Any equipment that performs marginally at the home station will fail in the harsh environment of the NTC. All vehicles and generators being deployed should receive a complete and thorough service before shipment. All lubrication points and bearings should be closely checked. Each signal shelter should be closely checked by the electronic maintenance shop. VHF rigs should be scoped and aligned, and all transmitter cases should have strong blower motors. Each shelter should have a working vacuum cleaner to aid in removing dust from the equipment. Close supervision of operator maintenance is a must. The best qualified organizational maintenance mechanics must be deployed.

Preparation for deployment should begin long before the actual exercise. The communications requirements must be determined early since they will determine the equipment and personnel deployed. You, as FASC platoon leader, should be responsible for all preparations since you will ultimately be in charge of the mission. You should be the battalion point of contact for all actions relating to the exercise. External support requests for supplies, repair parts, for example, must be initiated early if they are to arrive before the equipment is shipped. Check figure 1 for a list of milestones and suspenses that should be completed before deployment.

You must brief key officers and NCOs deploying to the NTC regularly throughout the preparation phase. Information must flow to all team members, so they will understand the mission and the preparations for it. Many soldiers have never been on a major deployment, and there will be a great deal of initial apprehension about the exercise. Meeting with the NCOs and soldiers will allow many of their questions and concerns to surface.

The deploying platoon will participate in one or more local exercises with the brigade elements before the actual exercise. It should deploy on these exercises just as it will deploy to the NTC. Equipment distribution, team composition, and circuitry should mirror the actual exercise as nearly as possible. This enables the operator to be trained on the same systems he will install later and increase his overall confidence. Task organizing also helps the brigade get used to supporting the platoon logistically before the actual exercise, something they may not be entirely used to doing.

DATE	EVENTS
MAR	Identify OIC for deployment and begin initial planning.
APR	Determine communications mission and equipment requirements. Begin actions necessary to stabilize key personnel.
MAY	Submit equipment/personnel requirements to BDE. Submit class III requirements to BDE. Begin requisitioning PLL deployment stockage.
JUN	Determine communications requirements at Ft. Irwin. Submit packing and crating materials listing. Request forklift support for packing. Perform legal screening of deploying personnel.
JUL	Submit Red/Yellow TAT count to BDE. Begin equipment services by BN service section. Obtain manifest cards. Conduct first dependent briefing. Coordinate pre-deployment FTX. Conduct orientation meeting for deploying personnel. Verify soldiers on check to bank pay option. Complete hazardous cargo handler/railload training. Check soldiers PRF, ID cards, and ID tags. Finalize PLL/SSSC stockage. Verify soldiers have wills initiated.
AUG	Submit shipping documents to BDE. Conduct pre-deployment FTX and recovery cycle. Submit final vehicle adjustment to BDE. Obtain meal cards for personnel on separate rations. Submit TOC access roster. Pack equipment and move to weight station. Perform final vehicle maintenance. Submit manifest by flight number to BDE. Submit hometown news releases to PAO. Move equipment to railhead.
SEP	Stage and railload all equipment. Pack individual TA-50. Conduct desert training and orientation. Advance Party deploys. Main body deploys. Unload equipment/move to TAA/prepare for field deployment. Force on Force training exercise. Move to Redeployment Assembly Area. Recover and pack equipment. Move to railhead and railload. Return to home station. Trains return. Conduct vehicle acceptance inspection. Unload trains.
OCT	Perform equipment recovery IAW unit maintenance SOP. Submit after-action report. Submit impact awards on personnel and complete counselling of all personnel on performance during exercise.

Figure 1. Deployment Milestones.

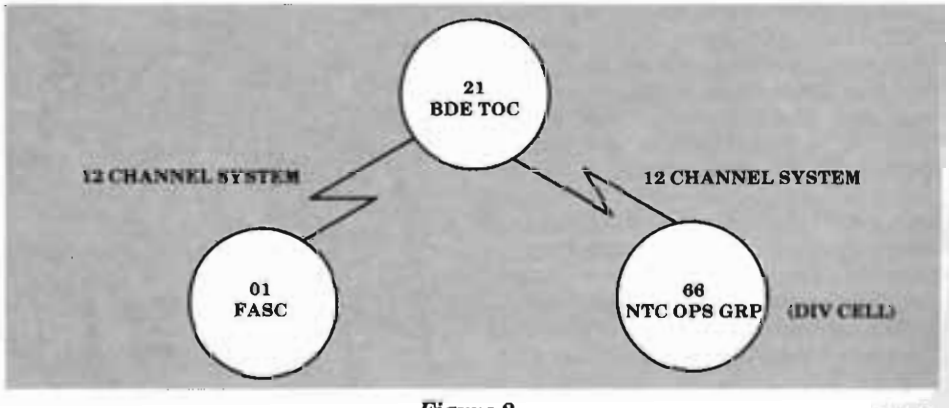

Figure 2.

CNCE
01 TML
66 TML
OIC
OPERATIONS
AUTOVON
AUTOVON ACCESS AT SITE 66
MSG CEN
S3 OPS SEC
G-3 OP (DIV CELL)
BDE TOC
S2 INTEL SEC
G-2 OP (DIV CELL)
FSCOORD
FSE CEN TOC
FSE (DIV CELL)
BDE CDR
BDE CESO
HHC CDR
MESS HALL
MAINT SEC
MILITARY POLICE
ENGINEER
CEWI
OTHERS AS REQ
DIV G2/3 (LL)
DIV G1/4 (LL)
DISTR BOX
BDE SWB (TTC-41)
(4) FASC SWB
DISTR BOX
FURNISHED BY BDE
RATT
RATT
VHF
VHF
NTC OPS (DIV CELL)
FAST
BDE A/L NET
DIV O/I NET
JUMP RIG

Figure 3a. Brigade Headquarters Signal Center and Wiring Configuration.

RATT STATION
BDE S-1
BDE S-4
BDE XO
FASCO
MEDICAL
S&T
MMC
AG FWD
MAINT CO
OTHERS AS REQ
SIGNAL NCOIC
BN FIELD TRAINS
(3)
FASC SWB (TTC-41)
G1/G4 (STRAP THRU 21 to 66)
AUTOVON (STRAP THRU 21 TO 66)
LEGEND:
SOLE USER
DTME PHONE
4W TRUNK
26 PR CABLE
MULTICHANNEL
ANTENNA
BDE TOC

Figure 3b. FASC Switchboard Configuration.

VEHICLES	
M151A2	(2ea)
M885 w/TTC-41	(2ea)
M561	(1ea)
M35A2	(1ea)
M885 w/VRC-49	(1ea)
M561 w/GRC-142	(4ea)
M885 w/TRC-145	(4ea)
M883 w/TRC-113	(2ea)
M885 w/PLL hut	(1ea)
TRAILERS	
PU-620	(5ea)
PU-617	(1ea)
PU-625	(6ea)
M416	(1ea)
M105A2	(1ea)
CONEX	(1ea)

Figure 4. Equipment Requirements.

MOS	GRADE	REQUIRED
25A	02	1
31Z	E7	1
05B	E5	1
05B	E4	2
05B	E3	2
05C	E6	1
05C	E5	4
05C	E4	4
05C	E3	4
26L	E5	1
26L	E4	1
31J	E4	1
31M	E5	6
31M	E4	6
31M	E3	6
31S	E4	1
36C	E5	1
36C	E4	3
36C	E3	2
63B	E5	1
63B	E4	1
63B	E3	1
	TOTAL	51

Figure 5. Personnel Requirements.

Upon arrival at the Tactical Assembly Area at Fort Irwin, you should visit the NTC Operations Group and coordinate the signal support with the Operations Group Signal Officer. This liaison will enable you to make any last minute changes to the circuitry prior to the beginning of the exercise. You should also meet the personnel who will be working in the NTC TOC to insure they understand all the communications they will be provided. This subscriber education will pay big dividends once the exercise starts.

The maneuver brigade will be task organized with the division assets which normally support the brigade in a tactical environment. Major elements supporting the brigade include engineer elements, a forward area support team (FAST), air defense, CEWI assets and military police to name only a few. The signal platoon must be able to provide multichannel communications to these elements in order for the brigade commander to be able to effectively control the brigade task force.

The communications provided at the NTC must connect the brigade TOC with the NTC operations group and the FAST. The NTC operations group typically acts as the division TOC and furnishes operational and intelligence data to the brigade. The FAST commander will coordinate all attached logistical elements to insure the brigade task force is able to sustain its operations.

Based on this analysis, the multichannel system shown in figure 2 will be installed. This system is basically one small slice of the complete division multichannel network, providing the link between the brigade and division, along with the link to the FAST. Lateral shots to adjacent FASTs and brigade headquarters are absent due to the size of the task force. The FAST also will not have its normal link to the DISCOM headquarters.

The circuitry for this system will also be a representative portion of the complete division multichannel network. It will provide sole user and switchboard access to the subscribers located in the vicinity of the TOC and FAST. Figure 3 shows the communications means provided the various subscribers and the wiring at the brigade headquarters signal center, along with the FASC switchboard configuration. A telephone directory listing all subscriber numbers, along with directions for using the multichannel system, should be prepared and distributed to all subscribers before the exercise.

In addition to the multichannel network, there will be RATT communications between the brigade TOC and Division RATT communications between the brigade TOC and Division Cell providing hard copy communications for intelligence data. A RATT station located at the FAST will operate in the brigade A/L net. Long haul RATT communications to the home station may also be required. This link should be operated from the Division Cell location since it does not displace during the exercise.

Once you have established the basic support to be provided during the exercise, your next task is to determine the personnel and major communication assemblages necessary to accomplish the mission while providing sufficient backup equipment to last through the exercise. Based on these criteria, the equipment shown in figure 4 should be deployed.

All equipment deploying on the exercise should have teams that are at full strength. The conditions experienced by personnel at the NTC are harsh. Two-man teams will not be adequate. Twelve hour shifts quickly erode morale, effectiveness and communications quality. In addition to the communications personnel, qualified multichannel, teletype and COMSEC repairmen should be deployed. Figure 5 lists the personnel who should deploy in order to insure adequate manning and capability for sustainment.

At this point, you have determined the basic mission and the major equipment required to complete it. However, it is imperative that you plan carefully to determine what other equipment will be deployed. Give careful consideration to what will be shipped and how it should be packed. You must know as much as possible about the mission before packing in order to be prepared for any contingency requirements and to insure a satisfactory exercise.

In addition to the communications related items required to complete the mission, you should also determine all

SSSC/health and comfort items that your soldiers will need during the exercise. This includes items such as snake bite kits, trash bags, shower pails, foot powder, desert respirators, wind goggles, and so on. Obtaining these supplies will make the desert conditions more tolerable and contribute to higher unit effectiveness.

After you are satisfied that your equipment is in the highest possible state of readiness and that you have the items necessary for deployment, you will begin packing your equipment for shipment. Most units going to the NTC are able to draw their equipment; however, there is presently no signal equipment available for units to draw, with the exception of FM radios. Consequently, you will have to ship everything you will use and be totally self-sufficient during operation. This requires that you develop a detailed load plan before packing. Consider the following checks as you prepare:

Pack your equipment the same way it will be deployed. Vehicle distribution at each site should be determined. Secondary items, such as telephones and wire, necessary at the outsites should be packed so they will not have to be redistributed once you are in the TAA.

Pack each shelter so it can function independently. Enough cots, water cans, camouflage, and so on to support that team should be available.

Insure each site has FM capability. Pack radios so they can be unloaded quickly. They will be needed immediately.

Be sure you have enough tentage and cots for all personnel. It does rain in the desert! Plan on taking one water can per person. Check closely to insure that you have enough camouflage to cover all vehicles, trailers, and tentage. It will be the only shade you have.

Insure you have enough cargo space so that all equipment can be taken to the field from the TAA. Take only one conex so it can be loaded in the cargo bed of the 2½ ton truck. Do not leave it in the TAA during the exercise, since you may be 30 miles away and realize you left something in it.

Make maximum use of conex inserts. Trucks can be shipped with a loaded conex insert on the cargo bed. Insure they are placed on pallets, covered with waterproof barrier paper, and are banded.

Assign packing teams to check that all shelters are properly packed and have all items listed on packing lists. As shelters are packed and sealed, begin preparing your shipping documentation as soon as possible.

Thus far, we have discussed items that relate specifically to the exercise. However, there are other actions that the soldiers must accomplish in order to insure they are ready to deploy away from their home station for a month.

These actions deal mainly with insuring that the soldier is legally and financially prepared for his deployment. It is the responsibility of the soldier's chain of command to insure that the soldier has provided for the care of his dependents during his absence. You should strongly encourage your soldiers to have their pay option changed to "check to bank." If they do not do this, verify that they have initiated a support allotment for their dependents, or have executed a power of attorney so their spouses may cash government paychecks. Soldiers with dependents or real property assets should also review their wills before departure.

Schedule a dependent orientation so that you can brief dependents on the departure and return dates of all soldiers, as well as on the overall purpose of the exercise. They should also be briefed on who to contact if they have problems during their sponsor's absence. Specific items to cover include: local assistance agencies, medical support, postal, legal and pay information, and emergency telephone numbers.

Dependent care is a responsibility of the command as well as of the soldier. Proper preparations will insure that the soldier is not distracted from performing his duties during the exercise by frantic phone calls or letters from home.

Proper training of all deploying personnel is essential to a safe and successful exercise. The extremes of temperature, terrain and distance require that all personnel be fully trained in the following areas: map reading; effects of the elements; water discipline; survival techniques; and animal, insect, and plant hazards. Much of this training can be conducted in a classroom. Schedule these orientations during the period after the equipment is shipped and before the personnel deploy. FM 90-3, Desert Operations, has a wealth of useful information.

In addition to the survival and safety measures covered, emphasize proper equipment maintenance in a desert environment. Without the proper maintenance, an adequate readiness posture cannot be maintained throughout the exercise. TB 43-0239, Maintenance in the Desert, should be obtained for each leader's reference. SOPs should also be developed concerning the reporting of circuit outages and personnel status. Due to the harsh terrain and the distances between sites, strict control of personnel movements between sites should be implemented. These rules will enhance the safety of all personnel and aid in conducting a timely search if someone becomes overdue.

The training value of such a deployment is greater than any that can be realized short of war. However, in order to gain maximum benefit from such an exercise, detailed planning must begin at an early stage. No area must be overlooked or given only cursory thought.

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