C2 Fix Officer Strength and Education Management

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s the U.S. Army switches to the concept of large-scale combat operations (LSCO), multiple areas are evolving and changing the way we look at contested environments. Arguably the largest area that needs restructuring is how the Army communicates at different echelons, namely with division becoming the unit of action. This consists of reviewing manning and equipment at division and below.

The Army Structure (ARSTRUC) and Command and Control (C2) Fix initiative have stated that the amount of signal equipment, classification of material, and manning at echelon needs to change to support survivability in a LSCO environment against a peer or near-peer adversary. This article considers the manning of specialized Signal military occupational specialty (MOS) positions in the brigade S-6 shop and assesses proposed changes that would move those positions from the brigade to the division or a signal battalion. I will offer analysis of the impact of these proposed moves and a recommendation to change the training for specialty MOSs that will remain at the brigade level to help fill capability gaps that will otherwise result from the changes.

In keeping with C2 Fix and ARSTRUC, much of the upper tactical internet we are used to seeing at the brigade and battalion echelon will either be moved to the division level for a signal battalion or phased out in general. Equipment such as the Tactical Communication Node (TCN) and Satellite Transportable Terminal (STT) are getting cut because they are too large and inconsistent with the intent of getting lighter and faster to increase survivability. With these assets going away in one way or another, the need for personnel in the brigade S-6 shop will shift greatly, particularly in the technical expert officers — the network technician (255N), server technician (255A), cyber security technician (255S), and data systems engineer (26B). Three of these four are being slated to move to division or the signal battalion.

The cyber security technician has already been identified to move up to division. These technicians are frequently underutilized in their specific role at the brigade level because most firewall management and cyber security policies are overseen by the division. Given that this MOS is are also significantly below desired strength Army wide, it is not hard to understand moving them to the division level. Data system engineers have chiefly been used as the assistant brigade S-6, supporting the S-6 OIC with planning and administrative dealings, but typically getting minimal hands-on utilization with servers and other equipment they have been trained to operate.

The fielding of Integrated Tactical Network (ITN) equipment expanded the scope of equip-

ment and responsibilities of the network technician (255N). Since nearly every piece of signal equipment has an Internet Protocol (IP) address (including radios), this has significantly expanded the scope of responsibilities of the 255N.

Lastly, the server technician — when the brigade hosted its own services, it made sense for the 26B and 255A to manage those pieces of equipment. Now the division will host effectively all services, and the brigade may have one or two Tactical Server Infrastructure (TSI) Small servers in its formation to act as local compute and store devices to help alleviate bandwidth needs on common operating picture services like the Command Post Computing Environment (CPCE).

Senior Army Signal leaders, such as COL Michael Wacker and BG Paul Howard, have expressed a preference of bringing the network technician and data system engineer, along with the cyber security technician, to division echelon or alternatively reassigning them to the signal battalion. This would leave the S-6 officer-in-charge (OIC) - a major - and the server technician as the only officers in the brigade S-6 section. The server technician would then need to manage the admittedly limited server presence at the brigade, while also remaining responsible for the larger networking requirements that go along with ITN. However, the return of signal battalions will alleviate a significant part of a 255A's current workload. This still puts server technicians at a stark disadvantage when operating and troubleshooting with non-organic signal teams due to lack of relevant training at their Warrant Officer Basic Course (WOBC).

For the reasons discussed above, it is recommended that if the U.S. Army begins manning brigades this way, with only the OIC and server technician, the training for 255As must be revisited. Network technicians and data system engineers both receive six weeks of Cisco networking classes in their training, but server technicians only receive the first two weeks of this course. This puts 255As at a significant disadvantage without those additional four weeks of training. They will still be competent with some network and server knowledge, but providing the additional four weeks of training will alleviate the steep learning curve if they come straight from their WOBC to a brigade S-6 assignment.

The initiative to move the network technician, cyber security technician, and data system engineer to the division and signal battalion is ultimately the right move, albeit there will be some growing pains associated with it. Utilizing their skill sets to enhance augmented teams that will support brigades is the better move — due to operators and technicians being able to focus almost exclusively on their job set and not have the additional requirements found in a brigade combat team. Keeping the server technician at the brigade level, at least for a first assignment (especially if TSI Small servers will stay at that level) makes sense, but they will need to have that additional network training to be fully prepared for their first assignment.

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Soldiers from the 2nd Mobile Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) conduct vehicle preparations in anticipation for the Large-Scale, Long-Range Air Assault as part of Operation Lethal Eagle 24.1 on 21 April 2024, on Fort Campbell, KY. (Photo by SFC Joseph Truesdale)