

Battalion Signal Officer

CAPTAIN THOMAS J. MARTIN

Suppose you are the S-3 or executive officer (XO) of an infantry battalion that is about to gain a new signal officer. (Or maybe you're the one who is new in the battalion and the signal officer has been there for a while.) After considering how your communications support has worked in the past, you will want to start on the right track with this officer by telling him what you expect of him and by assigning him some goals and objectives for his duty assignment.

Before you can do that, however, you will need to consider his abilities, training, and experience. The following outline of a battalion signal officer's duties and responsibilities, along with a list of possible performance objectives for him, should give you a start. Each of the objectives, wherever possible, includes a means of making an objective determination of the officer's performance.

Although the ultimate mission of the combat support branches, including the Signal Corps, is to support maneuver forces, including the infantry, this concept is not as prominent in a signal officer's formal training. In fact, his duty in your unit carries the Additional Skill Identifier (ASI) 6B, which cannot be earned at the Signal School at Fort Gordon, Georgia. It is awarded at the Field Artillery School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, when an officer completes the Battalion/Brigade Signal Officer Course (BBSOC). (This used to be called the CESOC, or Communications-Electronics Staff Officer Course.)

If your signal officer completed BBSOC, he received extensive hands-on training on equipment that is found

in your unit. This includes FM radios, radioteletypewriters, wire and telephone systems, and communications security equipment. The course is also increasing its emphasis on SINCGARS (single channel ground and airborne radio system) and MSE (mobile subscriber equipment) in anticipation of the fielding of these systems to maneuver forces.

If he has not attended BBSOC, though, you will need to consider what training he received in his basic and advanced courses. In a nutshell, he completed the common core subject material prescribed by the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (everything from Soviet doctrine to field sanitation); then he was trained in the operations of signal battalions and brigades. He was also trained in the employment and control of equipment found at echelons well above your unit.

The lesson for you here is that if you have an opportunity to influence the selection of your next signal officer, ask for one who has attended BBSOC.

Local conditions, too, will determine how much experience the signal officer has had before he gets to your unit. At installations in the continental United States, new officers out of the officer basic course will usually be placed in a signal unit for his initial assignment. This is a good policy, because this assignment develops and tests the officer's technical skills and gives him an understanding of the missions and capabilities of the brigades, divisions, or corps he may support. It also gives him a good ground-level view of supply and maintenance, because he is responsible for 10 to 50 vehicles, generators,

communications systems, and the like.

On the other hand, if a new Signal officer is initially assigned to a small post or isolated overseas location where there are few if any signal units, he may get no such opportunity, and his initial assignment may be to an infantry unit. If this turns out to have been the case with your signal officer, his performance will depend heavily on the guidance you give him from the beginning.

The following ideas will give you a start in developing a duty description for him. Then you can adjust the scope of his duties to reflect your type of infantry organization.

- He is responsible for all communications matters that will influence the battalion's operations, training, support, and maintenance missions.

- He is responsible for successful communications at every level within the battalion, both in garrison and in all tactical environments.

- He leads the communications platoon of 20 to 30 soldiers. He is responsible for the performance of the platoon in its primary missions, which are to provide battalion-level tactical communications and to provide organizational maintenance of all electronic equipment in the battalion. He is responsible for the platoon's readiness and for the proper operation of its assigned equipment.

- He is directly responsible for training battalion-level signal soldiers in their assigned duties and in the common soldier skills. He has staff responsibility for training signal soldiers elsewhere in the unit in their MOS tasks, and for the signal related training of all soldiers.

- As the communications security

(COMSEC) custodian, he is directly responsible for the physical control of the battalion's COMSEC equipment and related sensitive items.

The following list will help you develop goals and objectives for the signal officer's duty performance. In each area, suggestions for assessing the officer's progress are included. This list constitutes a set of high goals; unless yours is an ideal unit, you will not be able to attain all of them at the same time.

To maintain continuous communications in tactical situations. Although there is no scale on which to measure this objective, it belongs at the top of the list because it is the signal officer's mission statement. Some independent judgments may be available if your unit conducts an ARTEP or deploys to a major training center, but the final decision is the unit commander's.

To develop and implement a training plan for communications soldiers and radio operators. This plan should be the signal officer's primary contribution to the unit training schedule and periodic training guidance. The plan can be assessed through the soldiers' SQT scores and the abilities they demonstrate each time they talk on the radio.

To execute a thorough preventive maintenance program for assigned radio equipment. This also belongs on the unit training schedule. For example, your signal officer should arrange for regular five-mile radio checks of all assigned radio systems. He should provide the distant station and enforce the proper documentation. This is the single most valuable action, but the most consistently ignored. The unit's operational readiness (OR) rate is the most common maintenance indicator; the average processing time for job orders and requisitions is also important. This goal should be broken down into several parts, such as the OR rate, calibration, requisitions, and the like.

To maintain the following standards of training within the communications platoon: 100 percent SQT validation, with an average score of 80 or higher; 100 percent APFT (Army Physical Fitness Test) qualification; 100 percent

weapons qualification; and 100 percent licensing of the operators of the assigned vehicles and generators.

To maintain strict accountability for battalion COMSEC assets. This area is governed by specific regulations with the goal of avoiding measurable incidents (namely, violations and insecurities). In the absence of unfavorable indicators, you can assess the COMSEC system in your unit at any given time by visiting the COMSEC vault and asking for an overview of the accountability system. You will probably learn something new about the extensive documentation that is behind the scenes in this area.

To support the HHC commander in supply control, crime prevention and physical security, reenlistment, and the quality of life of the soldiers. The HHC commander will be happy to give you his evaluation of the signal officer (and the rest of the staff) in these areas.

To continue his own professional development. You will want to encourage the signal officer's progress in this area, subject to readiness requirements and the unit's deployment schedule. Possible goals include military correspondence courses or credits toward an advanced degree.

To maintain his own physical conditioning. The officer can state a specific goal for his own APFT, or set a goal for participating in local 10-kilometer runs or other athletic competitions.

In addition to these objectives, other possible objectives include:

- Preparing for deployment to a major training center.
- Staff planning for MTOE changes, unit relocations, and the like.
- Fielding of a new communications system.

These goals will not be met, though, if you just hand them to your signal officer and turn him loose. He will need guidance and training before he can even attempt to influence the current state of affairs in the unit.

To develop this officer's skills, you should see that he attends some training courses while in your unit. One of the most important is the Standardized COMSEC Custodian Course (SCCC),

which is required by the governing regulations. This course is offered at the Signal School and in overseas theaters. The course material is also being incorporated into the Signal Officer Basic Course; if your signal officer has completed this instruction, be sure you have the documentation. Under current funding restraints, some units have arranged for instructors to come to their locations, certifying up to 50 people for the temporary duty costs of only three instructors.

PLL COURSE

Another valuable course is the prescribed load list (PLL) course given at your or a nearby installation. Batteries and parts for radio equipment can be expensive, and your signal officer's share of the Class IX account can be considerable. He has to understand supply, maintenance, and readiness (SMR) codes, maintenance parts list (MPL) stockage, and all the other supply terminology.

In addition to these courses, you will have to train your signal officer in the tactical missions of the unit. His formal training covered combat operations only in the broadest sense, with no tactical application or maneuver-based field training. The only way to overcome this deficiency is to get him out of the tactical operations center and down to the action. Have him take his radio-teletypewriter rig and some other equipment and become the objective for a reconnaissance mission. Send him out where one of your companies is conducting a passage of lines in the middle of the night. Quiz him on the commander's intent after a mission briefing.

More fundamentally, you will have to develop his skills in leadership, training, and discipline as they are exercised in the infantry. Although many signal units also have high standards of training, these units do not do anything to the enemy. The aggressive, decisive leadership that prevails in the infantry is not built into a signal officer. Only you can develop his battle focus to your standards.

Finally, although duty in a maneuver unit is probably the most important assignment in the Signal Corps from a wartime point of view, many signal officers do their best to avoid this duty. Some have developed an attachment to fluorescent lighting and coffee pots. Others have heard horror stories about signal officers in maneuver units who were fired or rated poorly for things

that were beyond their control.

Leaders within the Signal Corps have part of the responsibility for dispelling such misconceptions. But only you, the signal officer's leader, can give him a clear set of goals and, in turn, acknowledge his contributions to the unit. If you will start with the signal officer you have now, give him a clear mission statement, and recognize his achieve-

ments, then many other capable signal officers will follow, and your continued success will be assured.

Captain Thomas J. Martin is a Field Artillery group signal officer assigned to the Southern European Task Force (SETAF) in Italy. He previously served as signal officer of the 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division. He is a 1984 ROTC graduate of Georgetown University.

SWAP SHOP



MARKSMANSHIP WITH CHEMICAL PROTECTIVE MASKS

Traditional marksmanship techniques do not work when a rifleman is wearing the M-17 protective mask. The filter in the cheekpiece of the mask prevents him from getting close enough to the stock to see through the sights. It is possible, however, to use the mask as a support and to "instinct shoot" with acceptable combat accuracy:

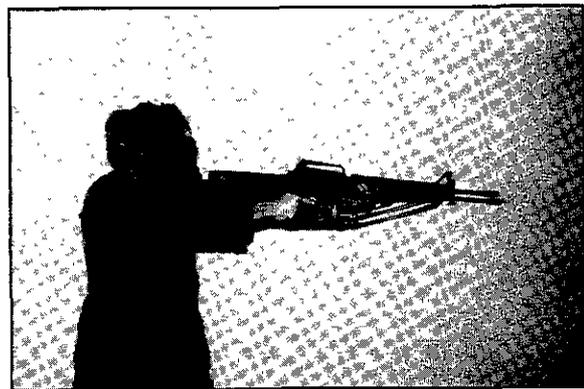
In the prone position, the firer allows the barrel of the rifle to rest on a support and presses the butt of the stock firmly against the mask's voicemitter. The lower part of the butt rests in a pocket formed by the thumb and forefinger of his left hand. The left hand, in turn, may have to be supported in the crook of the right arm. (Because the left hand cannot grasp the forward hand grips, the use of any available support for the rifle barrel gives the best results.) This three-point stability allows the rifleman to put out steady, accurate fire. (Left-handed shooters, of course, reverse the instructions.)

When masked, the firer uses the sitting position rather than the kneeling position. He sits as if doing sit-ups, then crosses his ankles and places his upper arms just forward of his knees. His left hand is placed under the magazine and the rifle butt pressed firmly against the voicemitter.

For both the sitting and the prone positions, the rifleman sets the rifle buttstock firmly against the nose of his mask, which permits him to aim through the sights. Shooters who have difficulty using the sights may aim by looking directly over them. With practice, both methods yield acceptable accuracy. Recoil from the M16 is scarcely felt in this position.

When standing, a masked marksman replaces the voicemitter support technique with instinct shooting. This technique resembles a combat pistol stance, and it requires a quick snap-shot before muscle strain decreases accuracy. The rifleman holds the weapon normally by the pistol grip and foregrip, takes a step toward the target, raising the weapon as he does so until both arms are fully extended. He does not press the stock against his mask. As in combat pistol shooting, the marksman fires a shot as soon as the sights come level with his eyes. Because this stance is the least stable, it requires the most practice.

Using these techniques, a masked rifleman will be able to meet any aggressor on a chemical battlefield with steady, accurate, deadly fire.



(Submitted by Kevin L. Jamison, a former Special Forces officer, Kansas City, Missouri.)