

Scout Platoon

COMSEC and the Information Process

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Light infantry soldiers have found that they must be smart, aggressive, innovative, and quick-thinking. Leaders must take advantage of their soldiers' innovative ideas, incorporate them into their standing operating procedures, and train to use them in their missions.

Too often, leaders come across good ideas about the time they are ready to leave their units, and nobody benefits from them. I would therefore like to share with other unit leaders some ideas that we used in the 7th Infantry Division (Light) for communications security (COMSEC) and information exchange. Some of these ideas can also be adapted to other types of units.

First, units spend too much time on the radio trying to send intelligence reports to the battalion. Although the platoon headquarters operates with a Vinson device, too much transmission time gives enemy radio direction finders plenty of time to locate the sending unit.

Each battalion should have two KL43C secure devices. The KL43C is a point-to-point, burst message device that encrypts messages that are typed into it and decrypts messages it receives. It can send about four pages in 30 seconds.

The battalion S-2 should get one of the devices and learn how to use it, and the scout platoon should use the other one. The scout platoon headquarters types in the message, then calls the S-2 and tells him to prepare to receive a message in three minutes. This allows the S-2 to make sure the KL43C is hooked up and prepared to receive.

When the platoon headquarters types the message, the device encodes and sends it, and the receiving device receives and decodes it.

Using this piece of equipment accomplishes essentially two things: It cuts down on transmission time, and it provides the written information on a screen.

The second idea provides a safe way to carry the signal operation instructions (SOIs) forward of friendly lines. The system may seem somewhat confusing at first, but a practical exercise will demonstrate how efficient it is:

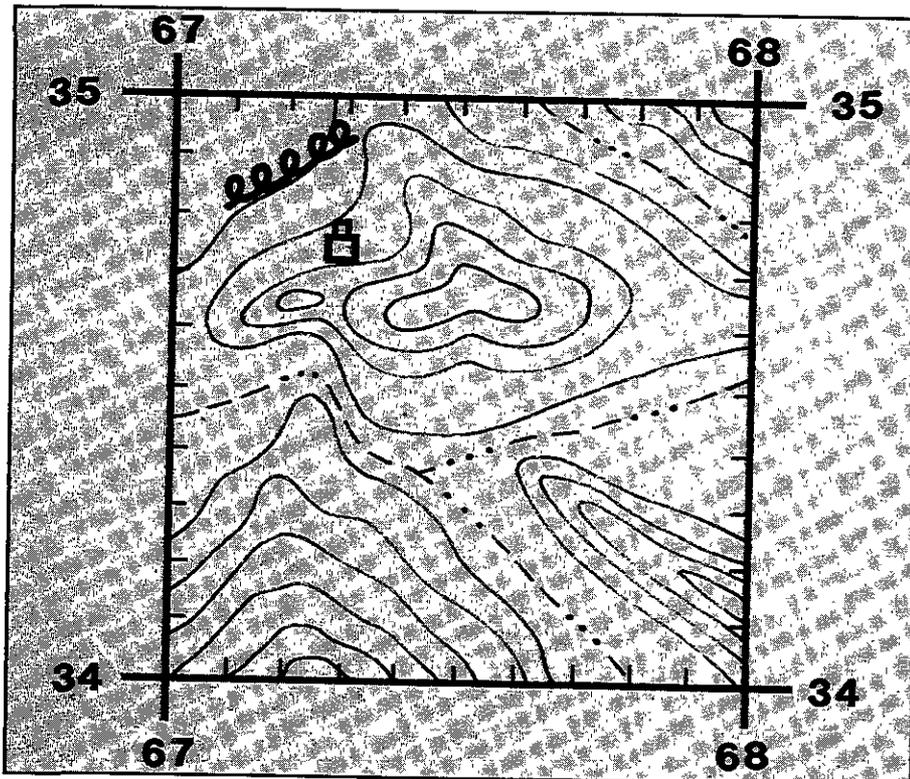
First, choose a pro-word that provides ten different letters; then number the letters from 0 to 9.

Example: OCEAN BIRDS
01234 56789

Use these letters to encode the frequencies and SOI call numbers (suffixes); do not change the SOI call letter (sign). You will also need to change the station identifiers to names that are easy to remember. An example of these changes is shown in the accompanying table. The left side of each column is as read in the SOI; the right side is after encoding using the pro-word.



STATION IDENTIFIER		CALL SIGN		FREQUENCY	
SOI	ENCODED	SOI	ENCODED	SOI	ENCODED
BN CDR	CHIEF	H37	HAR	35.40	ABNO
X0	NAVIGATOR	H40	HNO	35.40	ABNO
S-2	OUIZ	H29	HES	35.49	ABNO
S-3	CHANGES	H13	HCA	35.40	ABNO
HHC CDR	JEFF	J37	JAR	52.80	BEDO
SCT PL	GUIDO	B24	BEN	46.50	NIBO
1ST SOD	FUZZY	B28	BED	46.50	NIBO
2D SOD	MOE	B61	BIC	46.50	NIBO
3D SOD	GUNNY	B39	BAS	46.50	NIBO



Before going to the field, the headquarters radio telephone operator (RTO) encrypts the number of pages needed from the SOI and makes copies for each element. This system is easy for the soldiers to use, and even if enemy soldiers obtain the encrypted SOI, they will not understand it.

To encode this information further, instead of numbering the pro-word from 0 to 9 each time, start the numbers on the third letter for day one, then use the fourth letter for day two, and so on.

Example: OCEAN BIRDS
89012 34567

The final idea concerns the intelligence gathering process from the reconnaissance and security (R&S) teams to

the scout platoon and from the platoon to the S-2. When the R&S teams send information about the target on the radio, it is difficult to understand exactly what the objective looks like. This becomes increasingly difficult when information is coming from several teams occupying different vantage points.

To achieve a better picture of the objective, the RTO (or a soldier with drawing abilities) draws the terrain during mission planning to depict the grid squares and terrain where the suspected target is located. The scale of this sketch must be as close to the operational map scale as possible, with the grid squares showing 100-meter marks.

The RTO then makes duplicates (carbon paper is preferred to speed the process) to hand to each R&S team, along with one for the platoon headquarters and one for the S-2. The R&S teams, once in their observation posts (OPs), draw the objective, as they see it, onto the map. Then they call the report in to the platoon headquarters.

While one OP is calling to relay the information to the platoon headquarters, the other OPs transfer the information onto their maps. This process prevents erroneous duplication of equipment and positions on the target area. It also ensures that if the headquarters element is captured or killed, the next person in the chain of command has all the information. The headquarters then draws each item onto its map, including breach points and attack positions, as seen by each OP. The platoon headquarters then sends this information to the S-2, using the KL43C. The S-2 now has a detailed sketch to use for planning. If the scouts are to provide guides when they link up with the line company, the team can give the map to the company commander.

The map sketch should include as much of the surrounding area as necessary. For example, for the map shown here, OP 1 calls in concertina wire starting at 671348 and running to 673349, and the wire is drawn onto all the teams' maps. OP 2 calls in a truck at 673347 facing north, and it is also drawn onto all the maps. This continues until the whole picture is complete.

This process does require a lot of time on the radio from the teams to the platoon headquarters, but the gains outweigh the risks. The ideal solution, of course, would be to provide a KL43C to each team, if enough sets were available.

These ideas are worthy of any unit's consideration and should be welcome additions to their standing operating procedures.

Lieutenant Tony M. Martin was assigned to the 3d battalion, 17th Infantry at Fort Ord when he wrote this article. He had previously served as scout platoon leader and as a line company executive officer and platoon leader. He was commissioned from the officer candidate school in 1988.