The S-3 Air

More Than An Airspace Coordinator

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When asked what the S-3 Air does, many members of an infantry battalion task force will say only that he coordinates tactical air support. Army field manuals do not do him justice either. Field Manual 71-2, *The Tank and Mechanized Infantry Battalion Task Force*, says he is the principal assistant to the S-3, and that he coordinates the use of battalion task force airspace and the employment of air support with the fire support coordinator, the tactical air control party, and the Aviation liaison officer, as well as the Air Defense section or platoon leader.

Coordinating tactical air support is certainly his primary function, but he is normally given other duties as well. And since he is the battalion's only assistant staff officer in the authorized rank of captain, it is reasonable to expect that he will do more.

On the basis of my year as a battalion S-3 Air in the 3d Infantry Division, including a training rotation at the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC), I would like to suggest the following list of possible duties and responsibilities for the S-3 Air:

- Prepare and issue the task force warning order.
- Develop possible friendly courses of action (COAs).
- Lead the planning group in the analysis of these COAs.
- Prepare the task force operations overlay.
- Supervise the assembly, reproduction, or issue of the task force order.
- Participate in the order briefing: Prepare visual aids (operation sketch), and brief portions of the scheme of maneuver.
- Prepare the terrain model for the task force rehearsal.
- Lead the rehearsal.
- Perform the duties of "battle captain" during the execution of the operation.

Many of these are duties normally conducted by the battalion S-3 or executive officer (XO). When the S-3 Air does any of them, the S-3 and the XO may assume supervisory roles in the planning process. The S-3 can then concentrate on coordinating all the battlefield operating systems (BOSs) into the plan instead of focusing strictly on the maneuver elements; the XO can devote more attention to supervising the combat service support (CSS) planning for new operations and recovery from previous operations.

The Warning Order. A warning order needs to be prepared and issued immediately upon receipt of a mission so the task force will have as much preparation time as possible. If the S-3, the XO, and the commander are not available, the S-3 Air can go ahead and prepare the order. Changes to the order or additional instructions can be added later through a net call.

Immediately upon receipt of an order from brigade, the S-3 Air can disseminate it to the various elements of the planning group, and then prepare a warning order on the basis of their guidance. A standard warning order format can be found in most unit tactical standing operating procedures.

The S-3 Air can get the assessment of the enemy situation from the S-2. On the basis of the brigade order, he can add the task force mission statement, the required attachments or detachments, the earliest time of movement, and a general concept of the operation. As for the time and location of the order brief, the S-3 Air must seek guidance from the S-3 or the commander.

Friendly Courses of Action. During continuous operations at the CMTC, a task force normally receives a new mission before completing the last one. In the absence of the command group, the S-3 Air can begin developing friendly COAs, in coordination with the planning group—S-2, S-4, fire support officer (FSO), task force engineer, and air defense artillery platoon leader. Having planned previous operations with the S-3 and the battalion commander, the S-3 Air normally has a fairly good understanding of the way they like to fight. He can also find help in an off-the-shelf orders book containing orders the commander previously approved. When the members of the command group arrive, they will have more time to analyze and refine the COAs that have already been developed. Members of the planning group can then incorporate their expertise in the various battlefield operating systems into the further development of the COAs.

Analysis of the Courses of Action. The S-3 Air may assemble the planning group and lead the COA analysis. The final product is a recommended course of action and the results of the group's wargaming analysis. The S-3 and the commander will conduct their own analysis and make a decision, of course, but if the planning group has conducted an initial analysis, any obvious flaws or improve-

ments can then be addressed before the decision briefing to the commander, once again saving time in the planning process.

The Operation Overlay. Once the commander has selected a course of action, a graphic overlay of the operation must be prepared as quickly as possible. This overlay is an essential reference for each element of the planning group. The FSO, for example, must know the general route and the planned positions before he can plan targets in support of the operation.

The commander and the S-3 can make a rough sketch of the control measures to be used (preferably with water-soluble markers), from which the S-3 Air can then prepare the final graphics. He can add appropriate names to the various control measures as most units have an SOP to ensure common understanding of terms. He must ensure that everything is written or drawn clearly before reproduction. If time is very limited, the commander may be able to sketch only portions of the operation, and the S-3 Air can add other necessary elements, such as routes to deploy from the assembly area or mortar positions.

While the S-3 Air completes this task, the S-3 is free to supervise the preparation of all elements of the order. In addition, if S-3 and the commander have to attend a brigade rehearsal or "sticker drill," the planning process can continue while they are away.

Assembly, Reproduction, and Issue of the Order. Assembling pieces of paper, reproducing them, and issuing them to the various task force elements is not a difficult task, but it is a critical one. A company that does not receive the engineer annex, for example, may maneuver directly through a friendly obstacle and suffer casualties.

The S-3 Air has a thorough understanding of what the order should contain and can therefore ensure that it is complete before beginning reproduction. He can also act as a "quality control" inspector while copies are being made. Finally, he can issue the order to all elements of the task force in order of priority. For example, he can have all elements sign for copies of the order as they enter the tactical operations center

(TOC). The operations NCO can also perform these duties under the supervision of the S-3 Air. If there are any questions during the reproduction process, the S-3 Air should be able to answer them.

The Order Briefing. Since the S-3 Air has prepared the operation overlay, he should also prepare the operational sketch for the order briefing. Normally, the sketch is no more than the operations graphics superimposed on a larger background without a map. A large sketch illustrates the plan in far greater detail than a 1:50,000 map with overlay. The sketch must clearly portray all control measures, objectives, obstacles, planned targets, and CSS locations.

Additionally, the S-3 Air may brief portions of the scheme of maneuver, allowing the S-3 and the commander to listen to the order, review it, and address any issues that are not presented clearly. Since they have a clear understanding of the plan, the S-3 and the commander are more likely to leave out parts of it as they brief, assuming that others also understand it. If they stay in the audience for a portion of the briefing, they can make sure the plan is presented fully and clearly.

The Terrain Model. Having drawn the operation overlay and the briefing sketch, the S-3 Air is probably also best able to prepare the terrain model for the task force rehearsal. All members of the planning group should then add their respective elements to the terrain model. For example, the FSO should add the appropriate targets so they are visible and can be referred to during the rehearsal. The S-3 Air coordinates the contributions of all elements to the terrain model and ensures their accuracy.

The Rehearsal. If the S-3 Air leads the rehearsal, the commander and the S-3 can again be part of the audience and observe with some detachment and ensure that the plan is complete and well synchronized. The S-3 Air should use the decision support template to conduct the rehearsal, addressing each BOS element during all phases of the operation.

The Battle Captain. As the battle captain, the S-3 Air can help control and coordinate actions on the battlefield from the TOC, in accordance with the commander's guidance and orders. He also receives most of the reports from the various task force elements. As a primary element of the "second team," the battle captain must completely understand the scheme of maneuver. Except for the commander, the XO, and the S-3, the S-3 Air probably understands the operation, its various BOS elements, and how they are synchronized better than anyone else in the battalion task force.

Someone in the battalion task force must complete all of the tasks listed, and often it is the S-3 Air. The duties and responsibilities I have offered here are only suggestions, but they are suggestions that have proved successful during many CMTC rotations.

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