



THE INFANTRY BATTALION AAR: OBSERVER-CONTROLLER TEAM PLANNING AND PREPARATION

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is the first in a two-part series on planning, preparing, and conducting infantry battalion task force after-action reviews (AARs). It deals with the training of the observer-controller team in external evaluations (EXEVALs). The second part, scheduled to appear in INFANTRY's March-April 1994 issue, will provide a more detailed look at procedures and techniques that are useful in developing and presenting good AARs.

After-action reviews (AARs) are conducted following training at all levels, but a full-fledged battalion task force AAR requires preparation during large-scale operations such as external evaluations (EXEVALs) and rotations to the Army's combat training centers (CTCs) with trained observer-controllers (OCs).

The Army's training doctrine calls for maneuver battalions

to undergo EXEVALs about every 18 months. Consequently, the key leaders and staff members in an infantry battalion can reasonably expect to perform the duties of observer-controllers (OCs) for a sister unit at some point during their tours of duty.

ARTEP 7-20-MTP, *Mission Training Plan for the Infantry Battalion*, provides excellent guidance for planning and conducting EXEVALs. My purpose here is to look at infantry battalion task force EXEVALs as they are conducted at home station, and to identify important principles and techniques for planning and preparation that can facilitate the AAR process and improve the quality of the end product. Although this discussion focuses on a light infantry battalion task force, much of it is also relevant to evaluations at company and platoon level, as well as to other types of infantry battalions.

Our CTCs serve as excellent models for planning, preparing, and delivering specific, detailed AARs. Units that con-

duct battalion task force assessments at home station would do well to adopt the high standards set by the CTCs. Many units conduct task force EXEVALs specifically to prepare for upcoming CTC rotations; too often, however, they copy the CTC plans too closely. If these units are to avoid some potentially serious problems in building EXEVALs, the leaders must recognize the important differences between the environment at a CTC and that at home station:

First, the opposing force (OPFOR) at home station will be less experienced than that at the CTCs, as will be the leaders' ability to control it so that OPFOR actions will fully support the intended training scenario.

Second, some home stations lack the CTCs' high-tech infrastructure—most important, instrumentation and OC communications.

Third, home-station OCs are usually less experienced and polished than their CTC counterparts.

Fourth, the entire AAR process, which has been refined by established cells at the training centers, cannot easily be duplicated at home stations.

Finally, and perhaps most important, battalion task force leaders usually stand in awe of the OCs they face at a CTC—and hence tend to readily accept their instructions and judgment calls—while the OCs at home stations have no such air of invincibility. It is best to remember that the evaluators and those they are assessing will continue to wear the same patch after the exercise ends. Bruised egos and hard feelings between the evaluated unit and the OCs (not to mention the OPFOR) can more easily be left behind at the CTCs, while similar feelings at home station can hurt a division if they are allowed to linger.

Additionally, leaders of a task force undergoing an EXEVAL at home station may feel even more threatened in one crucial respect: All their senior leaders are likely to be present during home station AARs, and their influence—real or perceived—is unmistakable.

Keeping in mind these fundamental dissimilarities between a CTC rotation and a home-station EXEVAL in terms of resources and environments, we can now examine the battalion task force AAR process and adapt it to our particular needs.

Upon receipt of a mission to head the OC team for an infantry battalion EXEVAL, the chief OC (here assumed to be an infantry battalion commander) should seek initial planning guidance from the commander of the controlling headquarters. The more obvious issues they need to discuss are the anticipated missions and the related scenarios; the depth of the evaluation—for example, Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) reaches down to squad level while the National Training Center (NTC) concentrates on platoon level and above; the breadth of the assessment—which has implications for OC task organization; and the rules of engagement—again, different among the CTCs.

In addition, the senior OC must ascertain the schedule and location for the task force AAR. Several points are important here:

First, the senior OC should argue for the allocation of at

least six hours after the mission changes or ends in which to prepare his task force AAR. This is consistent with CTC time lines and represents the minimum time necessary for an inexperienced team to put together an acceptable product.

Second, he should resist using multiple AAR sites. (It is often suggested that the final AAR be conducted in garrison.) The logistical difficulties involved in multiple sites outweigh any superficial convenience.

Finally, it is essential that separate battlefield operating system (BOS) AARs be scheduled (at least intelligence, fire support, and combat service support, and perhaps chemical defense and communications as well). But none of these should be conducted before the final task force AAR. Even at the CTCs, task force momentum is lost during BOS AARs when key leaders and staff members are withdrawn from the field. Furthermore, home station OC teams are already fully committed just producing coherent task force AARs. The BOS AARs should be delayed until the unit has returned to garrison, which will ensure better attendance and interest and, as a result, better AARs.

The chief OC should meet with the commander of the task force being evaluated to get a first-hand assessment of the unit's strengths and weaknesses, and to ascertain where the commander would like the OC team to place special emphasis. From this point until the EXEVAL is completed, the chief OC should work hard to maintain an open dialogue with the task force commander. This will help reduce the friction that can develop between the evaluator and the unit, despite the best intentions of both.

At the earliest opportunity, the battalion responsible for establishing the OC team should form a working group consisting of key players from its staff and companies and from appropriate slice OC elements as well (usually at least fire support, engineer, air defense, military intelligence, and Air Force). It is also helpful if the working group includes representatives from the controlling headquarters, the evaluated battalion, the OPFOR, and any other elements deemed necessary (firemarker control, obstacle markers, and aviation brigade for example).

On the basis of guidance from the controlling headquarters, the infantry battalion that is to lead the OC team should task organize for the EXEVAL and assign responsibilities.

ARTEP 7-20-MTP serves as a good reference in identifying OC personnel requirements, with the following additional considerations:

- If fire support operations are to be continuously and comprehensively evaluated, the number of fire support system OCs suggested in the MTP must be doubled. (The MTP calls for only one captain and one sergeant first class for battalion and one lieutenant for each rifle company.)
- An OC must be assigned to each scout squad. It is not possible for the one lieutenant recommended in the MTP to monitor the activities of this critical unit, which is frequently dispersed and sometimes has communication problems.
- Even if they are not part of the formal OC team, key individuals in the OC battalion should periodically observe their counterparts in the evaluated task force to gain a better per-



An external evaluation conducted by experienced observer-controllers will give a commander a first-hand assessment of his unit's strengths and weaknesses.

spective of the way the unit functions, and to improve future training. These selected observations are best timed to correspond with activities that test the proficiency of their counterparts. For example, the operations NCO may visit the evaluated unit's tactical operations center (TOC) during a displacement; the personnel activities center supervisor may visit the field trains during reconstitution; and the NBC officer and unit NBC NCOs may visit their counterparts during a chemical attack.

- The OC battalion executive officer (XO) should evaluate his counterpart and monitor the synchronization of the BOSs in the TOC, staying with the TOC during the battle; the S-3 should assess the evaluated battalion's operations section and its integration of combat support assets, staying with the tactical command post during the battle; and the command sergeant major (CSM) should monitor his counterpart and focus on NCO leadership, soldier skills, and especially small-unit preparation for combat (which requires that he have his own vehicle). By assigning the XO, S-3, and CSM these areas of responsibility, the chief OC can be sure these key bases are covered in his absence. While he must observe task force operations orders, rehearsals, and actions at the objective, he needs to reserve a considerable amount of time for actually preparing the AARs, and should therefore rely on his team to get the necessary information for him.

The OC team members must be informed of vehicle and communication requirements at the outset, because this equipment becomes more and more critical as the EXEVAL date approaches. The chief OC must also inform his subordinate OCs who will be responsible for conducting separate BOS AARs after the exercise; usually the S-2, the fire support officer, and the S-4. Others may include the S-3, the NBC officer, and the signal officer, who will be conducting AARs in their functional areas.

In addition to the OC team itself, the observer-controller task organization must include the following:

Tactical Operations Center: Run by the assistant S-3 and

the operations NCO and augmented by most of the communications section, the TOC serves as a link to the controlling headquarters and the critical control elements (firemarkers, for example). It also functions as a listening post for all of the evaluated unit's key radio transmissions, which helps the OCs learn what really happened (instead of what each participant thinks happened) for subsequent AARs. To carry out these tasks effectively, the task force must have more radios and operators than those authorized. Accordingly, subordinate and slice units must be informed well in advance of the support they will need to provide.

AAR Site Support Team: Headed by the headquarters company first sergeant, the AAR site support team should number somewhere between a rifle squad and a platoon, with its NCO leaders present. The team is responsible for AAR site preparation, maintenance and police, and clean-up.

AAR Preparation Team: Led by the NBC officer, the AAR preparation team helps the chief OC prepare and present the task force AARs. As the team secures the training aids and audiovisual equipment to support the AARs, it must also include the necessary complement of personnel (equipment and computer operators, draftsmen, photographers, and the like).

Combat Service Support Section: Supervised by the support platoon sergeant, the combat service support section should provide all the logistic support to the OC team. The evaluated unit must never be burdened with the task of furnishing supplies to its evaluators. The section should provide mess, medical, maintenance and recovery, fuel, supply services, and limited Class V items (simulators and pyrotechnics).

In formulating the logistics support plan, it is important to involve the slice OC units, which are often forgotten. Additionally, the OC battalion must identify and request the resources that are essential to a professional evaluation. These include global positioning system (GPS) devices, MILES controller guns, OC Class V (ammunition), audiovisual equipment, and support for duplicating the training and evaluation outlines (T&EOs). The responsibility for replacing MILES

batteries and defective gear must be clearly specified by the controlling headquarters. Except for checking MILES gear for compliance with the rules of engagement (ROEs) and forwarding requests for MILES contact teams, the OC team members must not get involved in battery issue, direct exchange, or maintenance. If they do, they will quickly be overloaded, and their attention will be diverted from their evaluation and control tasks.

The OC battalion headquarters must also take the lead, along with the working group mentioned earlier, in developing a set of time lines and milestones that cover planning, preparing, and executing the evaluation. Because of the number of units involved, the headquarters must carefully orchestrate certain events—T&EO submission and publication, AAR site preparation, OC training, OC briefings to and link-up with player units, working group in-process reviews, and separate BOS AARs (which must be held at different times because many of the same people attend).

The following are some final points that the chief OC and his staff should bear in mind early in the planning process:

First, an OC battalion's task is time-consuming and leader-intensive. OCs should not allow unit commanders to plan sophisticated training during the EXEVAL under the theory that the "second team" will execute. Any such training will be "leaderless"; this is the time to schedule organized athletics, equipment maintenance, and clothing and billet inspec-

tions, which can be supervised by subordinate leaders.

Second, the OC chief must actively assist in the design of the EXEVAL. He should not assume that the higher headquarters was all-wise when it developed the initial concept. The OC team members may also have some innovative ideas that are worth considering; for example, shortcomings in the scope of the EXEVAL—such as failure to include electronic warfare or close air support in the scenario—should be brought to the attention of the controlling headquarters.

Third, the OC chief should consider taking a brief trip to the CTC that is the model for the home-station EXEVAL. He can learn more techniques by accompanying CTC OCs on just two evaluations than he can ever learn by reading volumes on the subject of AARs.

If the OC team is to conduct a thorough evaluation, it must be well-prepared and well-trained. The chief OC should first give all the OCs his general guidance and evaluation philosophy. He must reinforce the idea that the team's goal is to improve the training value of the EXEVAL. The OCs must therefore rigorously enforce the rules of engagement and continually search for and explore areas in which the evaluated task force needs work.

At the same time, the chief OC must emphasize the positive points and avoid contagious and destructive cynicism; then he must set the example. Any OC who makes sarcastic remarks about an evaluated unit's actions should be reprimand-



Site selection and training aids are important considerations when planning an after-action review.

ed swiftly and severely. An OC team is on the right track if it collectively believes that it is successful if it contributes to the evaluated unit's performance on its final EXEVAL mission, or on its subsequent showing at a CTC. OC solidarity with the evaluated unit is especially helpful in preserving camaraderie back at home station. The OCs should wear the same uniforms as their counterparts (helmets and not soft caps, for example), and exercise proper camouflage, noise and light discipline, and live under the same conditions as the evaluated unit.

OCs must prepare and train as both observers and controllers. For their observer mission, team members must study the doctrine in the relevant field manuals and MTPs, read CTC lessons learned—especially those from the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) series—and watch CTC AAR tapes that cover the same missions as those to be included on the EXEVAL.

The OC responsible for each BOS (with the S-3 covering maneuver and command and control) should collect the appropriate study material and plan centralized training (such as viewing CTC tapes) when it is appropriate to do so. The OC team must also prepare T&EOs for all missions, ensuring that all evaluated echelons and BOSs have been covered.

Three points must be considered here:

First, our ARTEP MTPs are guides, not directives. Blindly duplicating these T&EOs without editing (both deleting and adding) yields a high-density, low-quality product. For example, ARTEP 7-20-MTP does not specifically address the infantry battalion mission *search and attack*, and some effort is required to create a useful T&EO that covers it.

Second, if we are to be candid, the reams of documents we produce in preparing T&EO sets are worth far less than the formal AAR. Few have the time to go back and read the T&EOs, and even CTC take-home packages are rarely examined in detail. The point is that, in a world of competing priorities, preparing glossy T&EO books should rank low on the list. The real value of T&EO preparation lies in training the OCs on the things they will need to focus on during the EXEVAL.

Third, tasks should be consolidated whenever possible. Obviously, there is no need for all three rifle company commander OCs to prepare company, platoon, and squad T&EOs. Given the necessary guidance, they can share the work load in preparing one set of T&EOs; this will also ensure uniformity and evaluation to a common standard.

Another important part of preparing for observer duties is creating the AAR format. In addition to the techniques for structuring the battalion task force AAR, the chief OC must also guarantee the quality of all the AARs the team conducts. Our MTPs provide useful references, and the tapes of CTC AARs offer valuable examples. Particular emphasis must be placed on training junior officer and NCO OCs, because they may have had little formal training or experience in deliver-

ing AARs. Although the chief OC may want to standardize some briefing slides, he should avoid stifling initiative. Aside from directing that all OCs have the applicable T&EOs on hand during their AARs, he should allow each of them to develop a format he is comfortable with. He can ensure quality control by having the OCs backbrief him on their AAR plans.

OCs must also receive guidance on preparing OC cards and input for the collection charts to be used at the AAR. These charts provide aggregate data on selected task force and OPFOR measures of performance (casualties, fire missions, and the like). They are proposed by the OCs responsible for the various BOSs and can be patterned after those used at the CTCs and in ARTEP 7-20-MTP. They should be adopted, however, only if the data can be accurately collected (on the basis of available resources) and if they will contribute to the AAR. Some CTC charts may not meet these criteria if they are adopted without modification at home station.

After the collection charts have been approved by the chief OC, the assistant S-3 should prepare appropriate input packets for the members of the OC team, personally instruct the team members on the method of preparation, and serve as the focal point for the submission and compilation of charts during the EXEVAL. Because of the ad hoc nature of the team and the chaos that normally follows a change of mission, leaders must not treat this subject lightly if they expect meaningful results that they can use constructively at the task force AAR.

For the sake of efficiency, the OCs' training and preparation for their controller duties should be consolidated. This training can be accomplished in one day, and all OCs must attend. The OC responsible for each BOS should brief the relevant ROE (for example, the S-3 briefs the general ROEs and the maneuver rules, the FSO the fire marker system and the indirect fire casualty assessment tables, and so forth). Rifle companies should be tasked to present classes on MILES equipment—its wear, maintenance, zeroing, and use—as well as controller guns. ROE handbooks must be distributed to all OCs. The training should conclude with an operations order that emphasizes significant event time lines, combat service support, communications, and command and control.

At the operations order briefing, the chief OC should stress once again that the primary OC mission is to coach, while also refusing to compromise on tactical standards of performance and rules of engagement.

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