
The Hasty Air Assault

“Special Staff Officer”

LIEUTENANT MATTHEW C. DENSMORE

Hasty air assault operations give an infantry company, battalion, and brigade the flexibility to project a fighting force in both offensive and defensive operations. They allow the infantry to surprise the enemy and gain or regain the initiative and quickly reposition forces. As air assault infantry battalions and brigades increase the use of the hasty air assault to influence the battlefield, it is evident that having an aviation liaison officer (LNO) in the infantry battalion tactical operations center

(TOC) would greatly enhance the flow of information and the success of the operation.

Textbook battalion and brigade landed air assaults follow a deliberate planning and coordination time line and chain of command. The infantry battalion or brigade requests air assets through the brigade S-3, who passes it on to his S-3 Air and the aviation LNO, who passes it to the supporting aviation battalion S-3. Eventually the specifics of planning and coordination reach the

aviation company commander, platoon leader, and flight leaders through the formal air mission coordination meeting (AMCM) and air mission brief (AMB). Usually, there is enough time to adjust to intelligence updates on the enemy situation and changes in the ground tactical commander's scheme of maneuver to enable the supporting aviation platoons and companies to react to changes. For the hasty air assault, however, the situation usually dictates that a unit air assault one or more company

teams in 12 hours or less. The compressed planning time of a hasty air assault can lead to the loss of critical information between the ground tactical commander and the supporting aviation because there is no formal AMCM or AMB.

Thus, it is essential that an aviation LNO be working with the infantry battalion staff at the battalion's TOC throughout the compressed planning phase and throughout the execution of the hasty air assault. Where is the infantry battalion's S-3 Air, or the brigade's S-3 Air and aviation LNO? The battalion S-3 Air is relaying the commander's plan to the battalion staff and supporting aviation and selecting and establishing pick-up zones (PZs), both light and heavy, and PZ control. He is also staging the infantry companies for loading. The brigade S-3 Air and aviation LNO are probably continuing their management of airspace and supporting the other infantry battalions' air assault operations—including aerial reconnaissance and aerial resupply—leaving a void in this quick-reaction mission planning at the battalion level. An air assault infantry task force that strives to control the battlefield and stay ahead of the enemy must, therefore, provide the infantry battalion with an aviation LNO for that specific mission.

The aviation LNO would serve two main purposes in the infantry battalion TOC: First, he would translate the ground tactical commander's plan and intent into understandable tasks to the lift and attack aviation company commanders, platoon leaders, and flight leads. Since little time is available to prepare for a hasty air assault, time management becomes even more important than usual. The aviation LNO should be able to communicate directly with the supporting aviation company commanders, platoon leaders, and flight leaders to reduce the time it takes for the information to travel through normal channels. Second, the aviation LNO could provide the necessary updated information directly to the supporting aviators on the coordination specifics as the enemy situation and the ground tactical commander's plans are refined.

As an example, at 0800 hours, 3d

Battalion receives the mission to conduct a hasty air assault 12 kilometers to the west, no later than 2000 hours that day to conduct a deliberate attack on the enemy's combat trains in order to disrupt their lines of communication and reduce their ability to resupply. After hasty mission analysis and preparation of a fragmentary order, the battalion assigns the mission to Company A at 1000 hours. At 1300 hours the battalion S-3 Air, the aviation LNO, and the infantry company's XO conduct a hasty AMB discussing the operation's staging, loading, air movement, and landing phases.

At 1400 the battalion S-3 Air leaves to reconnoiter and set up the light and heavy PZs and establish PZ control. The aviation LNO relays all the hasty AMB information to the assigned lift

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and attack aviation units, and he coordinates with the battalion and brigade fire support officers for the field artillery's SEAD (suppression of enemy air defenses) mission and the Air Force's close air support mission. He does all of this to help the battalion staff ensure that the airspace and preparatory fires are properly timed and managed. At 1800 the brigade S-2 informs the battalion S-2 that scouts have reported that the location of the enemy trains has changed and that the primary LZ is too small to land any aircraft. The battalion S-2 informs the Company A commander, who quickly changes the landing plan, adjusts his scheme of maneuver and actions on the objective, and relays the information back to the battalion TOC. The aviation LNO contacts the lift aviation flight lead and updates the LZ location, land heading, door exit, and door gunner status. He also informs the attack aviation flight lead and battalion FSO of the changes in the location of the objective so they can quickly update the first plan.

At 1930 the Company A commander and his company load the aircraft. He radios the flight leader and confirms that he has received the latest changes. Because the aviation LNO was present at the battalion TOC and could quickly pass updates and coordinate with the aviators who are executing the mission, the lift and attack aviation flight leaders have the latest information. If the aviation LNO had not been in the TOC to pass the information, the flight leaders would have been flying blindly into an alternate LZ with no preparation. Furthermore, and even more devastating, the Company A commander would have lost the advantage of effective attack, field artillery, and CAS preparatory fires, consequently facing a full-strength enemy on the objective.

This example shows how having an aviation LNO at the battalion TOC can greatly contribute to the success of hasty air assault operations. Field Manual (FM) 90-4, *Air Assault Operations*, states that "an aviation liaison officer should be provided to the air assault task force from the supporting aviation unit and should be considered a special staff officer. His role is to advise the air assault task force commander on all matters relating to Army aviation and to jointly develop the detailed plans necessary to support the air assault operation. During the execution phase, he should be available to assist the air assault task force commander or S-3 Air in coordinating the employment of aviation assets." The hasty air assault is an excellent way for commanders to seize initiative and take the fight to the enemy.

In conclusion, the presence of an aviation LNO at the battalion level during hasty air assault operations fulfills the need for the right staff "team" as commanders strive to control the battlefield using a greater number of assets.

Lieutenant Matthew C. Densmore served as a rifle platoon leader and the S-3 Air operations officer in the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry, and served as headquarters company executive officer of the UN Command Security Battalion—Joint Security Area, in Korea. He is a 1995 graduate of Texas A&M University.
