
HANDS ON EVERYTHING:

COMPANY XO'S IN IRAQ

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So, this is it — you are a company executive officer (XO). What are you responsible for? How do you execute those responsibilities? What are the responsibilities of your new teammates? How does it all fit together? What does your commander expect of you? The battalion XO? The company?

The purpose of this article is to give a primer of what XO's can expect during a deployment to Iraq or in other combat environments throughout the Army.

The role of the XO in the company is analogous to what we expect of an XO at any echelon. He organizes the company assets in support of company operations. Although the company XO doesn't have a staff to manage, he actively brings together his knowledge of Army support systems to support the company team. His duties carry him through mission planning, sustainment operations, and maintaining accountability. Like the company commander, the executive officer is responsible for everything that happens or fails to happen in the planning, execution, and support of company operations. To be effective, he must be knowledgeable and proactive.

Operations

During mission planning, it is essential that the XO integrates his knowledge of company combat service support (CSS) capabilities into the commander's plan. The serviceability of critical equipment, consumption rates of different classes of supply, and a detailed knowledge about resupply capabilities of higher headquarters are areas that the XO must have command of to be able to effectively help the commander. In many units, the XO uses this knowledge directly in writing the CSS paragraph of the operations order (OPORD).

The XO is also responsible for ensuring that attachment and adjacent unit coordination is made. Miscommunication with attachments and adjacent units can potentially cause a number of miscues, jeopardizing the mission. Often, assumptions are made about what an attachment knows or is capable of. Clear instructions using unmistakable language is the best way to communicate with unfamiliar units.

Once the company operations order is given, the XO continues to supervise mission preparation. He enforces the company timeline and addresses any issues that may arise leading up to the start of the mission. He must be proactive during this period by spot-checking company elements to ensure that the commander's intent is being met. These tasks are often shared with the first sergeant.

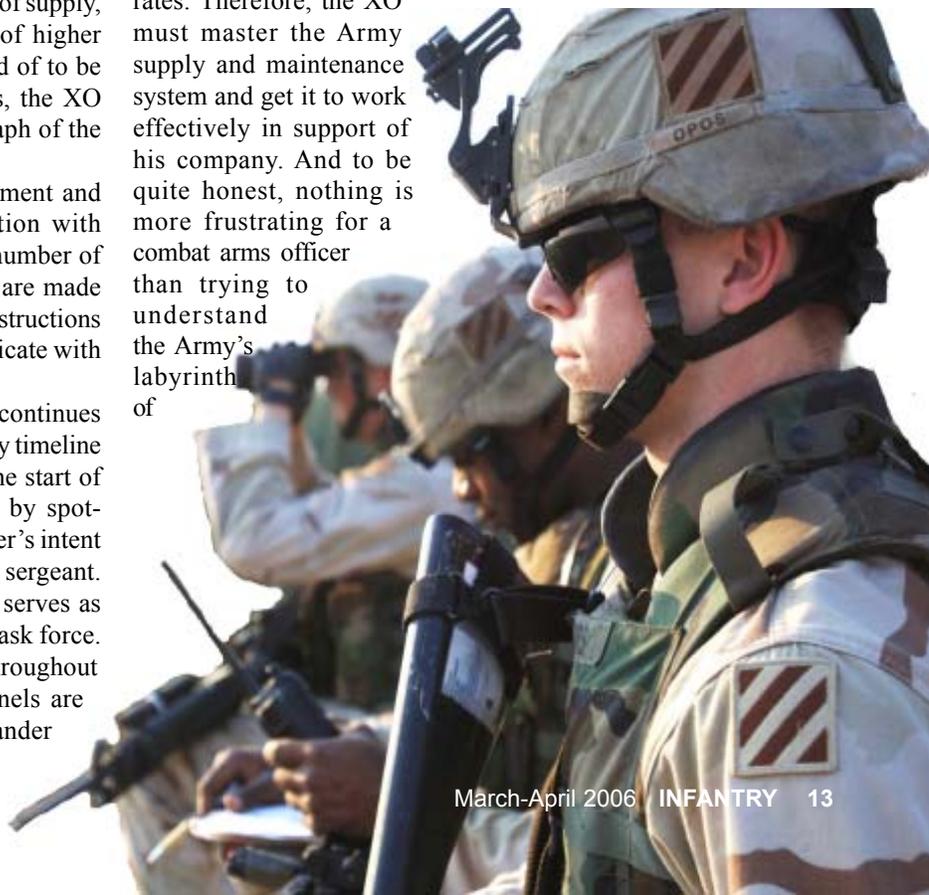
During company missions, the XO most effectively serves as the primary command and control (C2) element for the task force. The timely sending and receiving of accurate reports throughout the unit is important for mission success. These channels are critical during operations in order to help the commander

maintain situational awareness. Often, the commander's attention will be primarily devoted to maneuvering and monitoring the tactical situation. In contact, the commander can quickly become overwhelmed with information. By monitoring the task force net, the XO can relieve the commander of deciphering unnecessary radio traffic. The XO can respond to requests for information and filter information. The commander then can concentrate on making tactical decisions with the support of his XO who helps him maintain situational awareness.

Sustainment and Accountability

The XO's focus on efficient communication between his unit and others is also important in executing his steady-state responsibilities. During steady-state operations, the XO ensures that his company command post (CP) communicates effectively internally as well as externally. Demands on the company headquarters include transmitting information to and from higher headquarters, battle tracking of platoon patrols, and maintaining the company timeline. The company CP's vital role in directing information ensures the company can respond quickly to the changing combat situation.

Keeping the company supplied with all of their necessary resources is difficult when deployed. Units are consuming more and using equipment at rates estimated at six times their peacetime rates. Therefore, the XO must master the Army supply and maintenance system and get it to work effectively in support of his company. And to be quite honest, nothing is more frustrating for a combat arms officer than trying to understand the Army's labyrinth of



regulations, policies, and amendments. Yet, doing so is integral to the success of the unit. Companies need efficient support from the Army's logistical system to maintain combat readiness. It is in the best interest of the unit for the XO to dive right in, find out what works, and get busy.

Most combat units base their operations out of forward operating bases (FOBs). Many are so large that they house about three task forces including a forward support battalion. Having a forward support battalion on the FOB makes supporting companies less of a hassle. They have Class I yards where water can be picked up and a dining facility that serves four meals a day. Direct support maintenance is closer to units now than it was on their garrison bases. Having so many support facilities so close saves time and resources, enabling company XOs to focus on other areas to improve the unit.

Yet, sometimes logistical convoys must still be conducted to resolve property book issues and pick up and turn in Class VII. Although companies have access to e-mail and secure telephones, issues that arise are sometimes a bit complex and require face-to-face communication in order to reach an effective resolution. Working with brigade property book offices sometimes requires a convoy to their FOB. Throughout a deployment, you can expect to be fielded new equipment that requires convoys to different FOBs in order to receive and service the new equipment.

The headache for the XO in Iraq now is keeping track of property. Companies can have upwards of five different property books that they must balance. Much of the equipment is the same but just comes from different sources. There is no difference in how you use the equipment, but reporting its status to the different agencies can be a handful at times. At the same time, you will constantly be receiving, servicing, and turning in equipment from the various agencies. Making coordination with them by e-mail or phone can sometimes be difficult. It is usually best to convoy to where the brigade property book is located to handle the issue in person.

Leading

Leading headquarters platoon in their various missions can also be a challenge. Here again, the XO needs to be a leader.

Usually the XO has Soldiers of various MOSs consisting of commo reps, NBC, mechanics, a supply sergeant, and a supply clerk. Your headquarters element's logistical operations need to be synchronized with the combat operations of your line platoons. This can be a difficult task since many times you will be dealing with young Soldiers. Whenever possible you want to ensure you bring resourceful Soldiers with initiative into your headquarters element. They will have to be able to operate with little guidance and often under tight timelines.

The XO must be prepared to assume duties that fall outside of those normally or doctrinally prescribed. During my tour I was tasked to plan and execute a full-scale platoon gunnery, including Table XII. In the middle of a week's patrol cycle, we deployed with a small element to a range where my training team taught and mentored light infantrymen on the basic operation of the M2A2 Bradley and mechanized infantry tactics. Months later, I was tasked to plan and execute a small arms training program for a company of Iraqi army soldiers also at the range. Their training included RPG firing and a MOUT live fire. These experiences were quite rewarding and a welcomed change of routine.

Serving as a company executive officer is a great opportunity for growth. You have much more exposure to many leaders in your organization than when you were a platoon leader. Observing the leadership of more experienced officers in your organization, not to mention your own company commander, provides great insight into how to lead in today's Army. The challenges that they face are many of the same ones you could expect to see in the not-so-distant future.

Your increased exposure also allows you to build more relationships within the unit, which also contributes to your growth. Your relationship with other XOs in the battalion allows you to share information that can support your learning. You are all dealing with many of the same problems, and of course, four heads are better than one. Throughout our deployment we held weekly maintenance meetings with the task force XO, battalion maintenance officer (BMO), and team chiefs. During the meetings, we addressed logistical issues and solved problems together. These

meetings also served as a way to share information about future operations that enabled the company XOs to assist our commanders in planning. What you learn about the missions of higher headquarters and adjacent units puts your work in a greater context. This helps to clarify what you must accomplish in order for the task force to operate as a synchronized whole.

It also is rewarding helping the platoon leaders as they grow and learn. Many times you will serve as a sounding board for their ideas as they face many challenges that you have seen before.

The company team XO has to be a leader in his own right. This is not simply because he may be faced with commanding the company in the commander's absence, but because he has a huge role in influencing the company team. After assisting the commander in planning, it is the XO who will supervise mission preparation. It will be the XO who enforces the company time line and will become aware of obstacles to the plan before the commander. He will be the first person sought to clarify guidance and address problems. As a result, the XO is in the best position to resolve these conflicts if the resources are within his disposal. This could include resolving conflicting guidance, setting priorities, or making coordinations. In the execution of these duties the XO speaks with the authority of the company commander. To succeed, the XO has to possess the respect and competence expected of the commander himself.

In addition, the XO takes a great deal of pressure off the company commander and gives him greater flexibility to conduct operations that best fit the combat situation. Without you, the company would not be able to operate. There is enough doctrinal guidance for the first sergeant and the rest of the Soldiers to pick up the slack. Yet, the contribution of an XO is the only way that the company can realize its potential. With the great demands made on combat units in theater today, having an aggressive XO has proven indispensable to enable the company to accomplish its demanding missions.

Captain Brent Dial served as company executive officer for B Company, 1-64 Armor, 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized), which recently returned from a year-long deployment to Iraq. CPT Dial is a 2002 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy.
