



## The HHC Commander as the JSS/Forward TAC OIC

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**W**ith the changing nature of the light infantry battalion's headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) commander's role in a modular brigade combat team, this paper addresses a course of action for the tactical employment of the HHC commander in combat, particularly the role he can play in establishing and running a joint security station (JSS).

While fully immersed in the residency approach in Baghdad, our task force — the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment "Black Lions" — had an area of operations (AO) 6 kilometers away from the forward operating base (FOB); our FOB was 4 kilometers south of our southern boundary and 15 kilometers from the northwest corner of our AO. The distance in an urban environment such as Baghdad was too great for every operation and every emergency situation that occurred. It was necessary for certain battalion assets such as the battalion quick reaction force (QRF), maintenance/recovery team, small aid station, and a battalion forward tactical command post (TAC) to be located forward in order to synchronize all the battalion assets. With the focus on sustainable security and mentoring the Iraqi Security Forces, every task force will need to establish a JSS. In a modular brigade combat team (BCT), a light infantry HHC commander is one option to take charge of the JSS and TAC of the task force.

### **New Role of the HHC Commander on the Battlefield Still in Question**

The HHC commander in a light infantry battalion in a modular BCT has fewer logistical personnel than HHC commanders of the past. The battalion support platoon within the HHC no longer exists. The forward support company (FSC) now has all the logistical personnel that directly support the infantry battalion. Within the HHC the company commander has three specialty platoons to train and lead into combat: the scout platoon, the mortar platoon, and the medical platoon. A robust fire support cell is also present within the company, with a field artillery captain as the fires and effects coordination officer who is directly responsible for the cell's training and mentoring. And, as always, the staff falls under the umbrella of the HHC.

In garrison, during reset and training, the HHC commander's sole focus should be the training of the scout, mortar, and medical platoons. Those platoons need company-level support to plan and resource their training. The battalion commander and S3 focus on supporting the line companies, and the battalion executive officer (XO) focuses on the staff. The HHC commander, with each platoon leader, plans the training of the specialty platoons and proposes the plan to the S3 and command group. The mortar platoon training

*Vehicles line the outside of Joint Security Station Black Lion in Iraq.*

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will involve mortar sections from the infantry companies, as well as forward observers (FOs) from the infantry companies in coordination with the fires and effects cell, just as medical training will involve all the line medics from across the battalion.

Once the battalion is deployed and under task force organization, the majority of the fire supporters and medics are attached to the infantry companies. The scout platoon and the mortar platoon may be used in a number of ways. The Black Lions chose to use the mortar platoon to secure Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) assets, based on the BCT requirement that each task force provide a security escort for EOD in their AO (not all BCTs and task forces will be faced with this tasking). Using the same platoon, like the mortar platoon, for the task enabled EOD and the platoon to develop their tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) and hone their skills as a team over time.

The 1-28 IN used the battalion scout platoon and sniper section for sniper team locations and high value targeted raids across the AO. When a particular target the intelligence community was tracking made himself available, the scout platoon would bring the intelligence experts to the company AO for action as soon as possible. The scout platoon would be attached to the company that owned the battlespace and would incorporate their own platoon in the cordon and sensitive site exploitation.

We considered keeping the HHC commander in the rear to assist with planning all scout platoon operations in conjunction with the S3 and the S2. The S3 provides battalion-level planning, and the S2 provides experts from the Military Intelligence (MI) company as well as all intelligence available, but the scout platoon is forced to take all this information and break it down to platoon-level operations. What the HHC commander could provide is company-level detail, terrain analysis, and risk management. With the fast pace of high value target (HVT) raids and since the S3 and S2 were coordinating a plan for the scout platoon which was then attached to the battlespace-owning infantry company, we chose not to go with this course of action for the HHC commander.

We have seen other uses for the HHC

commander. We have seen the HHC commander given the combat power to own battlespace himself. We did not have the combat power to do that in this environment. We have also seen the HHC commander as a projects officer or community contracting officer. If you keep your HHC commander in the rear for contracting, you still have a JSS and forward tactical command post to operate, and you have to find the right person for that job.

A task force may have an extra lieutenant available for the JSS and TAC, and for 24-hour operations a task force would need two lieutenants. Then you have to look at the NCOs and personnel you will place at the JSS as well. You may have an additional assistant S3 who is appropriate for the job. The decision is usually personality driven in order to find the right person for the job. With an HHC commander, you have an infantry officer whose career path has enabled him to assume command, he has some tactical proficiency, and he can read the battalion commander's intent, support the infantry company commanders to achieve their goals, and can be responsible for a robust signature, on a coalition outpost (COP), away from higher levels of supervision.

### **The Structure of the JSS/TAC**

On our JSS we had the HHC commander and medical platoon leader run the TAC and supervise the JSS. Security and logistical support for the compound fell on the battlespace-owning company that owned the COP where the JSS was located. We had three NCOs (staff sergeants or sergeants first class), two communications specialists (one NCO and one Soldier), two medics who ran the forward aid station (one NCO and one Soldier), four Soldiers on rotations at the JSS for two-week periods, a recovery team that operated a M984 Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck (HEMTT) wrecker and an XM1120 HEMTT Load Handling System (LHS), and at times, other elements that assisted with welding or carpentry across the compound.

With only those personnel, we then had to split into two separate command posts (CPs): the TAC and the joint operations center (JOC). The TAC would maintain radio communications with all operations, battle

track the fight, coordinate battalion assets forward, track six military and national police transition teams (MiTT/NPTTs) and two police transition teams (PTTs), and communicate to the tactical operations center (TOC) on the FOB regarding any resources needed for the infantry companies or transition teams. The JOC would have a liaison with each Iraqi Security Force: local police, army, national police, highway police, fire department, and emergency medical services; train the Iraqi Army unit in charge at the JSS how to battle track and run a CP; coordinate with emergency medical services and the fire department; take walk-in tips, concerns, and claims; and field any issues/needs the Iraqi Security Forces had that required U.S. help.

With the JOC located within or adjacent to the Iraqi Army compound, we were concerned with whom we had at the JOC and what kind of security/force protection we could provide them. At any given time, there is a threat of militia or terrorists attempting to capture U.S. Soldiers. The entire JSS — the compound itself — was divided to ensure the force protection of U.S. Soldiers.

The NCOs (sergeant first class or staff sergeant) filled the role as the JOC NCO in charge (NCOIC). We had one staff sergeant (cook) provided by the FSC; one sergeant first class who had been removed from a platoon sergeant position; and one sergeant first class, artilleryman, the effects cell NCOIC. Later in the deployment, the effects cell NCOIC moved to a task force internal MiTT and a squad leader, infantryman, who had stepped down from his squad, became a JOC NCOIC as well. Two NCOICs provided day and night coverage on 12-hour shifts. Having a third allowed the NCOs to rotate back to the FOB for refit, if needed, or to assist in the TAC. The communications specialists (one NCO and one Soldier) also assisted the NCOIC in the JOC, keeping the buddy-system in tact 24 hours a day in the JOC and ensuring communication was always available at the JOC.

In the TAC, the HHC commander ran the TAC during the day, and the medical platoon leader ran the TAC at night. The four Soldiers on a two-week tasking at the JSS were Soldiers from the FSC from various Military Occupational Specialties (MOSSs)

whose primary task was to provide a female search team. Located at the TAC, they were forward positioned any time the infantry companies needed them. The battlespace owning company at the TAC needed the female search teams almost every day as female informants or claimants came to the front gate requesting assistance. When the female search teams were not conducting personal searches — which did not take up most of their time — they were radio telephone operators (RTOs) for the TAC. Two working together at all times, managed the battalion command net, brigade command net, battalion operations and intelligence (O/I) net, and battalion administrative and logistics (A/L) nets, the blue force tracker, logs, and phones.

The medics ran the aid station, assisted with injured personnel who came to the U.S. or Iraqi gates, assisted with detainee screening for the battlespace-owning company, and covered down on all medical emergencies in the area if needed. The recovery team covered down on all maintenance needs for all U.S. elements in the vicinity and also assisted the Iraqi Security Forces with their maintenance needs. Whenever a recovery asset was needed in the task force AO, they would drop the maintenance they were doing, meet up with the QRF, and move to wherever they were needed. If a female search team was needed, the medics or mechanics could often cover down on the radios.

### HHC Concerns/Recommendations to Alleviate Concerns

With digital framework in place, and the first sergeant (1SG) and XO at the FOB and the HHC commander at the TAC, all administrative issues could still be accomplished. The scout platoon and mortar platoon conducted their operations in the task force AO and found their missions leading them to the JSS numerous times. Any Soldier or the platoon leader, if face-to-face time was needed, had the opportunity. Any paperwork that needed to be signed was e-mailed, signed, scanned, and e-mailed back. The digital framework was supported by an AN-50 (a point-to-point and multi-point fixed broadband wireless system).

One of the biggest drawbacks to this method for the HHC commander is the lack of face time he has with each Soldier in his company. Most of the daily interaction is done over the phone. Lack of face time is a significant drawback; leadership is not something you can do over e-mail. However, you have to overcome the nature of the decentralized fight; you cannot look every Soldier in the eye before he makes a decision that could have mission impacting effects. We made scheduled phone calls a weekly event between me and my XO and platoon leaders. Guidance and a shared, known end-state must be communicated so everyone is moving in the same direction. We had to make the most of any face-to-face time we had. If a platoon came out to the JSS, I would visit with everyone. If I was back at the FOB



PFC Nathaniel Smith

*LTC Patrick Frank, commander of the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry, briefs GEN David Petraeus at Joint Security Station Black Lion June 30.*

(which I had to do four times during the 13 months the JSS was operational), I visited every leader, completed UCMJ, and inspected the arms room and supply rooms.

Another drawback is the extra level of risk management, terrain analysis, and planning that the HHC commander could provide to the scout platoon and mortar platoon that he cannot oversee from a different location. In addition, any issues, conflicts in timing, limitations or constraints that the two specialty platoons may have could be overlooked, and the commander needs to be there to fight for the platoons to ensure their safety or recovery. Fortunately, the scout and mortar platoon leaders were in their second or third positions within the battalion, and their maturity to weigh mission accomplishment with sustainability of the platoon was respected by the battalion commander, S3, and XO. Also, the HHC XO and FSC worked hard to ensure these two platoons, which often had very high operational pace, were taken care of immediately for services, maintenance, and battle-damage replacements.

There were times where a safety review and company-level planning would have helped, but we took risk in this area, knowing the mature personalities of each platoon leader, the XO, and the 1SG. And the benefits of a well run JSS and a battalion TAC, which supported the entire task force mission (including the transition teams' mission), outweighed the risks taken.

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