

3/7 Iraqi Freedom Operations and Training AAR

Excerpted from Enclosure (4)

1. Topic. Centralized planning decentralized execution.

a. Discussion. The Battalion spent the better part of six months developing, wargaming, rehearsing, writing, and rewriting the plan for the first twenty-four hours of the campaign. One spurious intelligence report (see reference (b)) nearly invalidated all of this work. There was almost no planning time spent on anything that was to occur thereafter. Further, enemy action, internal friction, and challenging weather patterns precluded detailed OPOORDs, rehearsals, and brief-backs from occurring. Most frequently, commanders at all levels in the Battalion found themselves receiving higher headquarters instructions over the radio, jotting down these FRAGOs in notebooks, and briefing their plan, again, over the radio. When time was available to gather key leaders for a face-to-face brief, the sheer exhaustion of commanders and staff members operating 24-hours per day, constantly on the move made the lengthy, formal briefs practiced in peace-time ineffective.

(1) Most of the staff was unused to writing clear, succinct FRAGOs, issuing those orders over the radio, and dealing effectively with the inevitable questions that arose.

(2) Because so many plans were written in a time-constrained, information starved environment, the integration of certain staff functions initially suffered.

(3) The lack of formal brief-back and rehearsal time prevented the Battalion from using the centralized control of fires and maneuver that are a by-product of the fires deconfliction and integration syllabus taught by the Tactical Training Exercise Control Group.

(4) The enemy did not present significant maneuver forces that would be susceptible to preplanned fires. Except for identified regime infrastructure and enemy tactical vehicles - most of which were abandoned - the enemy paramilitary forces his within urban terrain and never presented a lucrative target on which to mass fires.

(5) Towards the end of offensive operations, the Battalion Staff had gained significant skills in rapid development, issuance, and executions of simple, decentralized, violent

plans. These FRAGOs were issued entirely over the radio with the necessary questions and brief-backs all conducted over the same medium. Of interest is that precision, speed, integration of fires, and overall effectiveness against the enemy was significantly better than that experienced during the meticulously planned and rehearsed "opening gambit."

b. Recommendation. The six months of planning the details of the first day would have been better spent in command post exercises that forced commanders and staffs at every level to react rapidly to a turbulent, chaotic, unpredictable environment. Training staffs to formulate plans that had to be briefed over the radio would have eliminated significant levels of friction. A well staffed and guided red cell whose goal was not to "win" but to test every conceivable aspect of the operations plan would have readily exposed such flaws as a deficient rear-area traffic control plan, the need for a detailed civil-military plan post consolidation, the requirement for an integrated line of communication (LOC) security plan, and the requirement to deal with post-regime destabilizing elements.

c. Peacetime command and control training in programs like the Combined Arms Exercise should move away from a detailed plan that relies on perfect situational awareness and focus on applying the very relevant combined arms TTPs to the chaotic, information-starved environment that the Battalion faced during OIF.

d. Leaders at all levels should train work on improving their radio procedures. During training, the issuance of orders, conduct of rehearsal, and receipt of brief-backs should be conducted over the radio. Tactical decision game training for scenarios at the company level or above should require the solution to be briefed in the form of a FRAGO over the radio.

e. Digital communications must become a greater focus during tactical training at the Battalion level and below. The ability to download digital maps, imagery overlays, FRAGOs, smart packs, and execution checklists cannot be overstated.

f. An efficient plan to reproduce and distribute hard copies of FRAGOs and overlays to widely dispersed elements is critical to success on the modern battlefield. Tactical training of the operations section should include this critical TTP.