

A Traveling Command Post

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As the Fleet Marine Force begins to put into practice the concepts of maneuver warfare that have been emphasized over the past several years, infantry unit commanders have found that many of the traditional concepts, such as the use of general purpose (GP) and command post (CP) tents and infrequent displacements of CPs, are becoming obsolete. At the regimental and battalion levels in particular, a totally new approach toward CP configuration and requisite logistical support establishments is being taken. The 3d Battalion, 7th Marines has experimented with several different CP configurations, and the one they chose to use was recently tested at a division command post exercise (CPX) at Twentynine Palms. What follows is an analysis of this particular configuration, based on observations made during a recent division-level CPX.

Important strides are now being taken toward the development of a completely mobile command post system. At both the battalion and company levels, the emphasis is on rapid displacements and reduced set-up and tear-down times. With the adoption of the newer radar scattering camouflage nets and their support systems, it became evident that task organization of personnel within the CP group is a necessity. Responsibility for this normally rests with the headquarters commandant.

For the battalion command configu-

ration, both a tactical CP and an administrative CP were established. The tactical CP functions during displacements or whenever the battalion commander intends to move forward from the combat operations center (COC) and retain tactical control of the maneuver elements. The tactical CP includes only those personnel required to retain such control: the battalion commander, S-2, S-3, fire support coordinator (FSC), air officer (AO), and artillery liaison officer (Arty LnO). Also included in the tactical CP group are the headquarters commandant for future CP site selection and the communications officer (CommO). Vehicles used by the tactical CP group are MRC-109, MRC-110, and MRC-138 jeeps.

The administrative CP does not travel forward with the tactical CP during displacement, but rather remains stationary until the tactical CP reaches and establishes a new CP site; once this has been accomplished, the administrative CP joins the tactical CP at the new site.

To meet the need for rapid displacement of the entire command element, however, it was decided that the COC should be established in a covered 2½-ton truck with trailer in tow. Another 2½-ton truck with water trailer in tow carries the remainder of the essential battalion CP group. Inside the COC is where the bulk of the changes have

been made (see diagram). Staff members sit facing inboard, facilitating the passage of message traffic while permitting face-to-face communication among staff members. The value of this arrangement cannot be overstated. Two field desks occupy the center aisle. One is utilized by the battalion commander/S-3, the other is for the FSC and his supporting arms representatives. Both are stocked with pertinent reference materials and office supplies. Due to the confined space, the only journal clerk utilized is the S-3 clerk, and the AO employs the only radio operator (due to the number of nets required for the control of air assets). This means that principal staff members must act as their own radio operators and maintain their respective journals; this, however, has not seemed to hamper the internal functioning of the COC. Based on the premise that operations can be expected to continue over a period of several days, and in some cases much longer, a 24-hour watch system should be arranged by each staff section to ensure continuous functional operation.

The size and composition of the S-1, S-4, and battalion aid station sections varies according to the extent of their involvement in the particular exercise being conducted, but these sections are generally organized and employed in one of three manners: all three sections collocated with the COC, operating out of either a separate 2½-ton truck or towed trailer; each section operating independently from organic vehicles (M151 jeeps, etc.); or all three sections functioning as part of a separate logistics train with

when does he read military history? When does he do his wargaming, terrain walks, staff rides, and feet-on-the-deck thinking about the art of war? The price the officer pays for becoming a good NCO is not being a very good officer, and certainly not the tactical expert maneuver warfare requires.

The Marine Corps has a long way to go before it can claim to have a professional NCO corps similar to that of the British. Many nominal NCOs—corporals and sergeants—are just first-term enlistees. Far from living on a different plane from the troops, they room with them, dine with them, share the same club, and are paid comparably. Less than half of them have had any schooling in being an NCO.

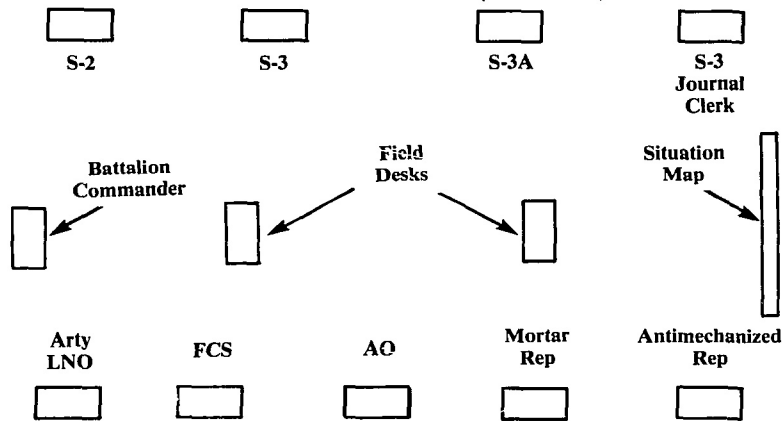
Part of the officer's unwillingness to let the NCOs run the units stems from the fact that many NCOs are such in name only. Another part stems from the "zero defects" mentality in the officer corps, from the fact that a platoon or company

commander can easily get "gigged" for maintenance, supply, or personnel problems, but seldom for tactics. So it seems safest to play NCO, to make sure all the details are handled right by handling them himself. We end up with lieutenants, captains, lieutenant colonels, and sometimes even generals who are, in terms of their interests and expertise, squad leaders.

What should be done differently?

- First, either make corporals and sergeants true NCOs or rename the E-4 and E-5 ranks and have staff sergeants at E-6 be the first NCO rank.
- If the Marine Corps decides to make E-4s and E-5s true NCOs, create (with DOD and Congressional help) significant differentials in pay, living conditions, and social life between the ranks of lance corporals and corporal. Attaining NCO rank should be neither automatic nor easy. It should require (a) passing a serious entrance exam for NCO school, (b) attendance at an NCO school of at least six weeks length, and (c) graduation

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representatives located with the COC. As stated, the particular method or combination of methods employed is a function of the extent of S-1, S-4, and BAS involvement, as well as the length of duration of the exercise.

Communications requirements for the battalion remain the same; however, the manner in which they are fulfilled has changed, and there are several notable modifications. The number of nets monitored in the COC is a function of task organization; however, there are certain nets which will always be required: regimental tactical net #1, battalion tactical net #1, regimental FSC, artillery conduct of fire (COF), 81mm COF, tactical air control party (TACP) local, tactical air request (TAR), and an antimechanized (Dragon) net. Additional nets (i.e., tactical air direction,

shore fire control party, naval gunfire ground spot), are employed as required.

Inside the COC, AN/GRA-39s, commonly referred to as remotes, have been strap-mounted to the sides of the truck. A quick-couple cable is run from the COC to "radio hill," where the radios themselves are positioned. The distance between the COC and radio hill must be maximized (not less than 1,000 meters), in order to ensure that any incoming indirect fire resulting from enemy direction-finding (DF) operations will be targeted on radio hill and not on the COC itself. The communications officer is responsible for task organizing his platoon in order to fulfill these requirements.

Overall control of CP displacement remains the primary task of the headquarters commandant, and close, con-

tinuous supervision is the key to an expeditious, orderly displacement. With some experimentation and much practice, a complete tear-down of the CP can be accomplished in less than 15 minutes, with the tactical CP en route to the new CP site. Set-up can take approximately 20-25 minutes, with all tactical nets up and functioning. These times, of course, are dependent upon terrain and the number of available personnel; however, they still represent a dramatic improvement over previous displacement evolutions.

This command post configuration concept is also used as a basis for the organization of the fire direction center (FDC) of the 81mm mortar platoon. Replacing the CP tent is a Gamma Goat with internally mounted AN/GRA-39s. Radios are remoted in a fashion similar to the arrangement for the COC, and mobility has increased considerably. All of the lessons learned from experimentation with the COC have been applied to the FDC, since the principles of command, control, and communications remain the same. This facet of the battalion structure must not be overlooked, since the overall mobility of any unit must be gauged by its slowest unit, and the supporting arms element of any combat organization is most often the least mobile.

The concepts developed by the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines are relatively new and are certainly not the final solution to the problems encountered in a high speed maneuver warfare environment. They do, however, represent the building blocks for future development.

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from the school (which also should not be automatic).

- Make NCOs formally responsible for certain aspects of the units' condition, possibly including maintenance, supply, and condition of facilities. This is a drastic step, since it would strike at the longstanding notion that the commander is formally responsible for all aspects of the unit he commands. But is any lesser step likely to be sufficient to free the officer from doing the NCO's jobs and simultaneously to allow the NCO to do his work without constant interference and oversupervision? We have entrenched habits to break, and it will not be easy. The goal is not a system with formal, bureaucratic divisions of authority between officers and NCOs, but one that divides responsibilities on a commonsense basis, giving the NCOs adequate authority, responsibility, and freedom of action. Some radical steps may be necessary to get there.

Finally—in this article, anyway—we need to re-

order some basic priorities. This reaches well beyond the Marine Corps. In fact, it is so fundamental an issue that it almost defines the whole military reform movement. Put simply, we need to make "preparing to win in combat" the guiding, overriding priority in the allocation of our time, our dollars, and our rewards.

Some might argue this is critical for either style of warfare, firepower/attrition or maneuver. To some degree this is true. But firepower/attrition warfare, which is essentially administrative and managerial, can be done better than maneuver warfare by a military that has made administration and management its first priorities in peacetime.

To do maneuver warfare, preparing for combat must be the focus of peacetime activities. Today, it is not. Public statements may say it is, but every Marine officer knows the real story. Training for combat, studying war, all the things that go to create tactical and operational expertise take a