

Response Cell Operations for a Brigade Warfighter Exercise or Similar Simulation Exercise

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When tasked with running our Cavalry Squadron's Response Cell (RC) for our Brigade's Warfighter Exercise we immediately searched for lessons learned/AARs from other simulation supported exercises but found none. Leveraging CPT Abrams' one previous RC experience, we came up with an effective, efficient way to man, equip, organize and operate our RC. After the Mission Command Training Program civilian OIC, a two time brigade commander, stated that our RC was, "the best I've ever seen in over 200 exercises," we determined we would document and share our experience with others likely to be tasked to man a RC.

For those who do not know, a RC stimulates a simulation exercise. It is the co-located command posts of the Company Commanders and their RTO/computer simulation operator a.k.a. "Puckster." The Company Commander/RTO then moves his units on the computer simulation according to plan. The computer then generates both printed and digital reports that are generically formatted and not in line with the unit's TACSOP. Reporting of information higher is key and the methods available to report information higher is through organic systems IAW the unit's PACE plan. The significant limiting factor to PACE is that battalions do not have enough digital systems per MTOE to fully digitize their RCs. Face to face communication is generally not allowed between the RC and higher HQ once the simulation begins.

Typically, these exercises are not run using the actual Company Commanders. Soldiers who are role playing the Commander need to be smart and very familiar with TLPs. The Puckster needs to be tech savvy and confident on the radio. Having enough equipment is key and requires prior coordination. If possible, get a dimensional lay out of your work space prior to arriving so you can plan an ergonomic setup. Each Troop should have at minimum 2 FM radios with antennas (OE-254 or similar) with cables that are long enough to be run to the outside of a secured building. A third and fourth radio is helpful to communicate on admin/logistics nets and fires nets. We used 1 squawk box on CMD net turned up loud for the entire SQDN RC which kept everyone on the same page while most of the other channels were on headsets so the room did not become more loud and chaotic than needed. Visual aids for reporting per our SQDN's TACSOP were hung on the wall in front of each workspace. The speed of the simulation is grueling at times. Setting up your RC prior to starting the simulation and conducting rehearsals with Squadron's CUOPS was instrumental. This allowed everyone to sync to each other's work habits and refine prior to execution.

This exercise requires 24 hour operations for a few days which we executed in 12-hour shifts. Our barracks were about 1.5 miles from the RC and the chow hall had set hours. We mention this especially for National Guard Soldiers who will more than likely utilize mass GSA transportation for groups of Soldiers so that units can begin to request additional GSA vehicular assets and coordinate timelines for pick-up/drop-off especially since most Soldiers will not be allowed to have their phone in the secure area.

Here is a suggested list of equipment/supplies for a successful operation: Map of operations area, acetate, 2" and 4" tape, sharpie markers, map markers, eraser marker, hand sanitizer or isopropyl alcohol for erasing large areas, dry erase markers, document protectors, large dry erasable sheets of

paper for a common operating picture/combat power tracker, 4x1523 radios per Troop, VRC mounts, power amps, SKL, squawk boxes, hand mics, radio headsets, paper towel, binder clips, thumbtacks, extension cords, power strips, butcher block with paper, cooler for drinks. Personnel roster- I mention this last because we tried it and seemingly everyone tries this according to our civilian regarding tracking KIA/WIA by name or battle roster number. It is extremely difficult once you start taking large amounts of casualties and then have them regenerated at some point. The computer will tell you what kind of person is killed or wounded by MOS (i.e. 11B30) and platoon but it is up to the RC to determine who that person should be. It is imperative that the SQDN S1 and the RC have identical personnel rosters prior to starting the simulation.

The training for the operators will be sufficient so that they will be able execute the plan on the computer program. However, what needs to be made very clear prior to the start of the simulation is what kind of unique equipment will be attached into the scenario. An example from our experience was that our S2 was expecting a MANPACK version of "prophet" equipment when in fact we got vehicle versions. Understanding the limitations of the simulation ahead of time will greatly help the staff function. The S1 and S4 will struggle the most dealing with "game-isms." Most of the re-supply and replacement of combat power is done automatically, effectively relieving the S4 of this requirement. The same goes for the S1 in that replacement Soldiers are auto-generated.

The predominant lens to look through when establishing a RC is how to most closely replicate multiple company command posts in a single room. Providing each computer station a primary and alternate means of communication ensures that battalion staff is exercised during the battle simulation. Rather than issuing orders and receiving reports to a single operations cell OIC, a properly established RC has the capability to flood the battalion command nodes with information and provide a more realistic experience.