

NEWS FROM THE CTC

17Jan 2018



You Won't Win the Fight During RSOI, but You Can Definitely Lose It: Fixing Your Communications



LTC Dexter Nunnally

Approved for Public Release: Distribution Unlimited.

You Won't Win the Fight During RSOI, but You Can Definitely Lose It: Fixing Your Communications

Signal Lessons and best practices

LTC Dexter Nunnally, Sr., Signal OC/T, JRTC OPSGRP

Executive Summary

During his tenure as Commander of Operations Group (COG), COL Sean Bernabe met with the leadership and staff of each rotational training unit (RTU) during Leader Training Program at JRTC. During this introduction, the COG briefed the RTU on 10 keys to success at JRTC. One of these was (and remains) the operationalization of Reception, Staging, and Onward Movement, and Integration (RSOI) at the Intermediate Staging Base (ISB) before entering Atropia. He advised the RTU to treat RSOI as an operation. Inevitably, many units fail to do so. Below are the trends OPSGRP Signal OC/Ts see during most rotations.

You Won't Win the Fight During RSOI, but You Can Definitely Lose It: Fixing Your Communications

Signal Lessons and Best Practices

LTC Dexter Nunnally, Sr., Signal OC/T, JRTC OPSGRP

During his tenure as Commander of Operations Group (COG), COL Sean Bernabe met with the leadership and staff of each rotational training unit (RTU) during Leader Training Program at JRTC. During this introduction, the COG briefed the RTU on 10 keys to success at JRTC. One of these was (and remains) the operationalization of Reception, Staging, and Onward Movement, and Integration (RSOI) at the Intermediate Staging Base (ISB) before entering Atropia. He advised the RTU to treat RSOI as an operation. Inevitably, many units fail to do so. Below are the trends OPSGRP Signal OC/Ts see during most rotations.

#1 The S6 fails to execute external synchronization meetings or establish RSOI Priorities of Work

- The RTU S6s rarely deploy with an external synchronization meeting or battle rhythm event in place that was practiced at home station. This event most often occurs for the first time during the JRTC rotation.
- The RTU S6 does a good job of identifying training objectives for the rotation. However, the key tasks required to meet those objectives are not identified in an OPORD and therefore fall by the wayside as competing requirements crop up during RSOI. From the COMEX, to validation of mission command systems at echelon, the S6s are reacting to fires vice following a prescribed checklist codified via OPORD.

#2 The RTU conducts a poor Communications Exercise (COMEX)

- The BCT/BN main command posts (main CPs) often push this off to the S6s to validate mission command systems (MCS), radios, and main CP functionality. The S3 does not participate nor direct the battle captain to control the COMEX. Generally, resulting in a COMEX that verifies connectivity, but not TOC functionality across the Brigade. “The BCT must validate all information systems on all networks they intend to deploy in the fight. The progression should be COMMEX, DIGEX and end with a full MCVALEX during RSOI to prevent 18 hour delays in establishment of the TAC and TOC once they enter the JOA and begin combat operations.”¹

#3 S6 sections fail to deploy with spare kits, batteries for communications equipment, etc.

- RTUs deploy to the JRTC without the spare kits for WIN-T assemblages. This impacts maintenance and increases the time systems are down during RSOI as parts must be shipped from home station or elsewhere.

¹ LTC Zan Hornbuckle, Brigade Mission Command Task Force Senior (BMC TF Senior), JRTC Operations Group (JRTC OPSGRP)

- RTU S6s do not deploy with batteries required for various lower TI systems and uninterrupted power supplies (UPS). The most common batteries, not part of the combat load, are hub batteries for Taclanes, SKLs, and radios.

#4 The RTU fails to deploy all communications equipment or deploys with broken equipment

- RTUs leave communications assets behind that enable mission command, especially line-of-sight capabilities. Systems generally left at home station are: 1) SMART-T (no trained operators or NMC), 2) HCLOS (no trained operators), SNEs, HF radios (MTOE specific), PRC-154 Squad Radios, and NettWarrior End User Devices and 3) Tactical Radio Tower (TRT).
- Some of the capabilities provided by these systems are: Beyond LOS (BLOS), situational awareness, and protected satellite communications. These are capabilities not available to the CDR to enable mission command when not deployed. “In addition, each unit that operates upper TI should resource, train, and deploy with a MC Master Gunner.”²

#5 Communications Equipment Slant

- RTU S6s do not battle track deployed communications equipment outside of WIN-T. They do not coordinate with Company Commanders and S4s to verify what equipment deployed to JRTC (this should be done at home station). It is always discovery learning during RSOI and JFE. Typically, this teases out as the BDE S6 develops a PACE plan that is not supportable by subordinate units because the required equipment did not deploy.
- It is important for the S6 team to first understand what is important to the CDR, then establish priorities that facilitate the commander’s ability to execute MC and focus on those systems in the COMSTAT. “This should clearly demonstrate how each WfF communicates and collaborates with subordinate units so they can maintain battle rhythm events and reporting to ensure shared understanding.”³

#6 Validation of Communications Systems (WIN-T assemblages, KLVs, LTI systems, MCS, Combat Net Radio Gateway)

- The RTU S6 attempts to prioritize communications systems to validate but it is not synchronized with the BCT/BN TOCs. The prioritization is often based on the S6’s capability to support based on manning, not mission requirements. KLVs, HF, TACSAT, and mission command systems generally are not validated prior to executing JFE. What they do not validate during RSOI is often ignored for the duration. Most units never get HF and TACSAT operational and of the KLVs deployed, not all are used during the rotation.

² LTC Zan Hornbuckle, BMC TF Senior, JRTC OPSGRP

³ LTC Zan Hornbuckle, BMC TF Senior, JRTC OPSGRP

How can RTUs address and resolve the above mentioned deficiencies? The best tools to “get after” trends 1-6 are: home station training, pre-combat checks and inspections, the 8-Step Troop Leading Procedures model, detailed planning and synchronization, the orders process, and detailed checklists that capture tasks completed before deployment.

#7 Poor Cybersecurity of the BCT network

- RTU S6s fail to provide network scans of their MCS to the JTF-21 J6 in a timely manner. This prevents access to the JTF-21 network as JRTC must validate the unit baseline prior to access to the network. This affects MDMP during RSOI.
- RTUs are not prepared to utilize the network tools provided with WIN-T INC2 to actively defend their “piece of the pie”. Most units do not have the network tools configured properly and the technicians do not know how to use the tools when configured.

Trend #7 solutions in detail. The best way to address this issue is through manning, training/cross-training, properly configured network monitoring tools i.e., Enterprise Service Manager (ESM).

- **Manning:** RTUs are authorized two Cyber Network Defenders (25D) and one Information Protection Technician (255S) for cybersecurity. Generally, if the 25D is assigned to the unit, the NCO is assigned as the COMSEC Account Manager (does not have this authority) When the 25D is doing the job trained for, JRTC OPSGRP notices a marked improvement in the RTU’s cybersecurity posture. RTUs will not receive a 255S in the near future, due to Army shortages, therefore, it is imperative the 25Ds are actually performing their cybersecurity duties.
- **Training/Cross-training:** The shortage of information protection technicians across the Army has resulted in an authorization, but no fills in the BCT. Thus, the S6 must cross-train the 255A (Information Systems Tech) and 255N (Network Management Tech) warrants. The skill set of the 255S is more specialized, but, between the 255A and 255N, the RTU can overcome the absence of its 255S. While not an ideal situation, cross-training of these two warrants is the quickest way to improve the RTU’s cybersecurity posture. The Division G6’s assistance will be required as there is a 255S on the G6 staff.
- **Network Monitoring tools:** The RTU must properly configure ESM and other network tools in order to effectively execute cyber network defense. The 255S at Division has the requisite skills to assist the RTU with this effort.

If RTU S6s follow the recommendations listed, “losing the battle” during RSOI will become a thing of the past.