Integrating ATP 6-02.53 into 3/1CD NTC Training

Voice of Greywolf

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In July 2024, as I took command of Charlie Company, 3rd Brigade Engineer Battalion, I knew that in nine months the "Greywolf Brigade" would be squaring off against one of the most professional opposing forces (OPFORs) in the challenging environment of Fort Irwin, California, as part of our National Training Center (NTC) Rotation, 25-06. Having completed an NTC rotation just 12 months earlier (NTC 24-06), the Greywolf Brigade understood that this environment was capable of exploiting organizational weaknesses through stressors that include a high operational tempo (OPTEMPO) and rapid decision cycles.

Utilizing Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 6-02.53 and the commander's intent, signal leaders across the brigade combat team developed and executed a five table RETRANS training program tailored to the brigade's training progression, nesting with gunnery windows, command post exercises (CPXs), and multi-echelon exercise events. Whereas the tables in the ATP are a good beginning, they are generic, my article attempts to show how this organization applied the doctrine and put "meat to the bones" showing a way to conduct a training progression during a short period between essentially back-to-back Combat Training Center (CTC) rotations.

Command Support

After action reviews (AARs) from NTC 24-06 identified a standardization shortfall in the Greywolf Signal Enterprise – the lack of a unified common operating picture (COP) for retransmission (RETRANS) operations to provide shared understanding between the brigade signal company and the battalion S6s. To address this shortfall, Brigade Commander, Col. Edward L. Arntson, directed the development of a training progression that seamlessly integrated RETRANS operations into brigade operations.

Like anything, units do well at what the commander checks, and there were many touchpoints, and azimuth checks with him to ensure his intent was being met. This training progression enabled eventual success during our NTC 25-06 rotation as noted from AARs throughout at all levels.

Train-Up

Synchronization and integration as themes were incorporated in planning, training, and execution. The ABCT saw unprecedented growth in the integration between the signal company, the brigade S6 shop, as well as each battalion S6. Once the brigade departed for the first brigade operation at NTC, there was no doubt that every signal asset in the box was, if needed, a BCT asset.

Table I (Soldier Level Certification)

Table I occurred two weeks prior to the brigade's tank and Bradley gunnery window serving as the signal version of Gunnery Skills Testing that the tank and Bradley crews were simultaneously executing. The signal company RETRANS platoon and brigade S6 NCOIC executed this table in accordance with the Training and Evaluation Outline (T&EO), validating all RETRANS teams in the brigade prior to gunnery and CPX progression. Training was conducted over four days: Day One in a classroom setting reviewing RETRANS operations and planning; Days Two and Three focused on round robin practical exercises; and testing on Day Four where the objective for certification is to establish two networks in accordance with T&EO standards. The end state of the training was that crews were prepared to support either gunnery or a CPX.

Key lessons learned during this table were the creation of a brigade standard for RETRANS operations. This enabled teams across the brigade to interface with each other and share best practices, allowing brigade leadership to evaluate commander capabilities.

Table II (Crew Level Certification)

Table II occurred during the brigade's gunnery window and CPXs 1 and 2 in the fall of 2024 (about seven months from NTC 25-06). Table II key tasks included stressing communication systems to identify equipment shortfalls. We did this by executing communications checks over distance, conducting continuous RETRANS operations, and incorporating sustainment operations. Pre-combat checks (PCCs) and pre-combat inspections (PCIs) required operators to conduct comms checks one week out at five pre-determined points set by the brigade S6 and signal company commander to validate equipment and frequency modulation (FM) communications at a range up to 13 kilometers.

Once validated, teams deployed with their respective battalion and established a hasty RETRANS site based on Systems Planning Engineering & Evaluation

Device (SPEED) analysis conducted by the battalion S6 or RETRANS platoon leader. Hasty RETRANS in the Greywolf Brigade is defined as the establishment of two priority NETs – Command (CMD) and Fires Voice or Data at echelon. Crews were certified by the RETRANS platoon leader/platoon sergeant or battalion S6 OIC/NCOIC prior to Table III. During this table, battalion S6 and RETRANS platoon leadership executed Logistics Package (LOGPAC) operations to sustain their teams. In addition, proper site security was evaluated for each of the teams. This added crucial training tasks to ensure survivability for RETRANS teams.

Key outcomes include synchronization between the brigade S6 and signal company commander, fostering relationships between the sustainment and signal communities, building leader trust and confidence in the FM network, and signal maintenance.

Table III (Platoon/Section Certification)

Table III occurred during the brigade's situational training exercise combined arms live fire exercise training three months prior to NTC 25-06. The purpose of Table III is to certify the RETRANS platoon and battalion S6 sections in an operational environment. Table III took three weeks to execute in support of the cyclic nature of each battalion's rotation into gunnery. During this table, the brigade S6 and signal company commander assessed the following certification criteria. Daily updates were briefed to the brigade commander on the progress of each team:

**** Brigade S6/Brigade Signal Company Commander***

- Develop and maintain RETRANS execution matrix to control the battlefield and limit overlapping locations. Matrix should be published over the Joint Battle Command-Platform (JBCP) to battalion command posts and RETRANS platoon leader.

**** RETRANS Platoon Leader (PL)/Platoon Sergeant (PSG) and Battalion S6 OIC/NCOIC***

- RETRANS PL/PSG: Using the provided matrix, develop operational orders (OPORDs) and send to team chiefs over JBC-P. Evaluate team chief's execution of troop leading procedures (TLPs). Commander receives all platoon messages to validate the PL's ability to issue clear and concise orders. The signal company first sergeant validates team chiefs' ability to establish a site and certifies PSG's ability to execute LOGPAC in support of brigade RETRANS team.
- Battalion S6 OIC/ NCOIC: Using the matrix provided, send missions to team chiefs over JBC-P. Evaluate team chief's execution of TLPs. Brigade S6 OIC receives all battalion traffic to validate the battalion S6 OIC's ability to transmit an order in a clear and concise manner. The brigade S6 NCOIC validates the battalion team chief's ability to establish the site and certifies the NCOIC can coordinate LOGPAC in support of their battalion RETRANS site.

**** Brigade RETRANS Team***

- Execute three jumps (one must during limited visibility).
- Establish two hasty RETRANS sites.
- Establish three deliberate RETRANS sites.
- Conduct one Forward Passage of Lines (FPOL)/ Rear Passage of Liens (RPOL) per team chief simulated by a truck having a mechanical failure. Practice immediate action drills (take one net down, bring another net up) to ensure there is limited network outages.

**** Battalion RETRANS Team***

- Conduct three Jumps (one must be at night).
- Establish two hasty RETRANS sites.
- Establish three deliberate RETRANS sites.

Key lessons learned during this table were the complexity of land management, the importance of cross-communication between signal leadership, consideration of RETRANS locations when selecting main command post locations, and the complexity of FPOL/RPOLs with brigade RETRANS team to ensure limited gaps in coverage.

Table IV: FM Mesh Validation (Brigade-Level Certification)

Table IV occurred during the brigade's FTX, which was our division-level certification prior to NTC 25-06. The purpose of the table was for division observer coach/trainers (OC/Ts) to certify and validate RETRANS operations nested with the brigade's scheme of maneuver.

During Table IV, the brigade S6 and brigade signal company commander participated in the brigade military decision-making process (MDMP) and published a RETRANS execution matrix as part of the brigade OPORD. This matrix helped synchronize battalion S6s and RETRANS PL prior to the brigade combined arms rehearsal (CAR). The following occurred during this table:

**** Brigade S6***

- Maintained control of the FM Network.

**** Brigade Signal Company***

- Deployed one RETRANS team as an anchor point to establish the initial brigade FM bubble.
- Maneuvered a second team to a call forward area (CFA) where a hasty RETRANS site was established. On order, established a deliberate RETRANS site at the primary or alternate location predetermined during MDMP.
- Provided LOGPAC standard operating procedures (SOP).

- ***Battalion S6 Teams***
  - Deployed team in accordance with the brigade RETRANS execution Matrix.
  - Provided LOGPAC per SOP.

Key outputs during this table were the brigade/battalion commander's ability to communicate within the FM Network, refinement of CP locations during offensive operations, use of triggers to move RETRANS teams from site to site, and the importance of coordination between the signal company commander and the brigade mobile command group comprised of the brigade commander, brigade S3, and field artillery battalion commander.

CTC Rotation (Table V)

While we were successful as an organization, we learned some key lessons to apply to future iterations of RETRANS Tables. The first lesson was how to balance tempo and aggression when emplacing RETRANS teams. During the first brigade operation, we were attritted to 5/9 available teams due to an aggressive emplacement plan. Additional emphasis and training on timing and tempo during Table I will increase the overall survivability of our teams.

Our second lesson was the use of JBCP Chat with all the RETRANS teams. This proved invaluable and should be incorporated during Table III. We found great success during our rotation using this chat feature. In addition to internal use, it allowed teams to provide vital intelligence to the brigade. Repetitions during Table III will create more streamlined reporting during operations. Integrating these lessons into our tables will allow Greywolf Signal Enterprise to improve Greywolf's communications and its overall lethality.

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Conclusion

Our goal going into NTC 25-06 was to build upon lessons learned from home station during Tables I-IV to provide secure, rapid, and reliable FM communications. During our rotation, the brigade reaped the benefits of active crosstalk daily between the signal company commander and the battalion S6s to ensure a COP. Further, RETRANS teams acted as critical OPs which resulted in the destruction of one enemy OP, one enemy jammer, and three armored personnel carriers.

These and many other examples of success in the rugged and unforgiving operational environment of NTC validated our implementation of the RETRANS home station training progression and contributed to a successful rotation. NTC OC/Ts agree with this assessment remarking that NTC 25-06 was one of the most synchronized rotations. This is largely attributed to the emphasis on signal operations from commanders and leaders within the Greywolf Brigade at echelon.

About the author

Capt. Daniel M. Horoho is a signal officer with four years of tactical communications experience. He is currently serving as the commander for Charlie Company, 3rd Engineer Battalion, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. Horoho has deployed to U.S. European Command and has been to the National Training Center four times. He holds a Bachelor of Science in geospatial information sciences from the United States Military Academy.

Reference

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