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MONOGRAPH

Artillery liaison, Operations of the 9th
division, ETO, 1942-45, by Lt Col W. O.
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LIEUTENANT COLONEL WALTER O. BEETS, FIELD ARTILLERY

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MONOGRAPH

COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE

Fort Leavenworth

Kansas

School of Combined Arms

Regular Course

1946-1947

ARTILLERY LIAISON

Operations of the 9th Division ETO 1942-1945

(Personal Experience of a Battalion Commander)

Type of Operation Described: Liaison With The Infantry
Regiment and Artillery
Battalion.

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Lieutenant Colonel Walter O. Beets, Field Artillery

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Monograph is to cover the principles and technique of Artillery Liaison as employed by the 9th Infantry Division Artillery. The treatment of the subject will be limited to that liaison dealing with the functions of the Infantry Regiment and the direct support Artillery Battalion.

For the purpose of presentation the subject will be divided into three parts. First will be taken up the organization and equipment of the Artillery Battalion Liaison Party. Next will be discussed the communications, both wire and radio, employed by the liaison sections and Command Liaison Officer. Finally, the functions of the Artillery Liaison Party with the Infantry Battalions and the Command Liaison Officer with the Regimental Headquarters.

It would be well to bear in mind at this time that this discussion is not designed to present either an approved method of employing these sections or a fast rule for their profitable employment, but rather is submitted as an historical example which met with credible success, and as such is submitted for your consideration.

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

The locale of the operations upon which this discussion is based, and the type terrain encountered follows the history of the 9th Division Artillery from the beaches of Algeria and Morocco through the Atlas Mountains to the rocky hill and desert country of Southern Tunisia, the scrub covered mountains of Northern Tunisia, and coastal rolling hills to mountain crags in Sicily. The hedgerow country in Normandy gave way to the fairly open rolling terrain of France south of St. Lo where speed was the order of the day. Belgium and the Meuse River, Germany and its Siegfried line lining and dotting the steep slopes of hills and nestling its great concrete and steel pill boxes in the Hurtgen and other great forests along the swiftly flowing Ruhr river.

The Ardennes, so famous now for its selection as the spring board for three major offensives in three wars, with its deep winter snows and days of false darkness underneath the boughs of its tall pine forests, is familiar now to all readers of military ^{an}als.

The Rhine River, perhaps the most prominent of all geographic features in Germany, gave way to the Hartz Mountains whose eastern slopes rolled down to the plains of the industrial centers and the junction of the American and Russian forces on the Mulde River.

During the period of this operation, the light field artillery battalion table of equipment provided for 3 liaison sections consisting of: 1 officer in the grade of captain, and 5 enlisted men, 2 jeep drivers, 2 radio and telephone operators, and 1 liaison sergeant. These sections were allotted under the TO on the basis of one liaison section to be utilized to effect liaison with each of the infantry battalions. The major items of equipment provided by the TO/E for each of these three sections was: 2 quarter-ton jeeps and trailers; 2 pair binoculars M-12; 1 SCR-610 radio with 1 remote control unit to be used in conjunction with the 610 radio and under special tables of allowances authorized by the Theater Commanding Officer, the battalion was authorized additional EE8A telephones to provide this section with 2 telephones. In addition to this equipment these sections were equipped with 2 miles of 130 telephone wire and 1 mile of 110 telephone wire.

The officer and liaison sergeant were armed with pistol, caliber .45; and the balance of the section with pistol, caliber .30 carbine.

In addition to this equipment, it was standard operating procedure that the section carried with it at all times 1 extra day's rations and 1 5 gallon can of water; 2 extra 5 gallon cans of gasoline; 2 extra sets of radio batteries. This was prescribed as a minimum requirement.

There were numerous other small items of supplies that this section found profitable to carry such as a small amount of medical supplies; an extra radio antennae and additional radio batteries; and in some instances a spare radio set. In addition, the officer and the liaison sergeant found it very convenient and profitable to provide themselves with a caliber .45 grease gun.

The means of communications utilized by these liaison sections were the normal wire and radio communications provided in the light field artillery battalion, and the equipment which was set forth in the first part of this discussion. It might be well to mention at this point, that wire, throughout the period of operation, remained the primary means of communication, and the establishment of wire communications was, where time permitted, habitually effected.

Within the battalion fire direction center there was established a fire direction switchboard with two circuits connected to the normal battalion switchboard. From the battalion switchboard, 2 lines were layed to the infantry regimental switchboard. The artillery liaison section had one line into the infantry battalion switchboard completing one circuit from the artillery battalion to the artillery liaison officer through the normal infantry artillery circuits. The command liaison officer at regimental headquarters also had a line back to the artillery battalion through the infantry regimental switchboard and in all cases the infantry communications officer bent over back wards to see that this liaison line had the highest of priorities in installation and maintenance.

In addition to these normal circuits there were direct lines laid from the battalion fire direction center to the forward observer in each infantry battalion sector. From a T-splice in this line there was a liaison line to the infantry battalion command post or the particular location of the artillery liaison officer in that battalion sector. A direct line ran from the battalion fire direction center to the command liaison officer in the vicinity of the regimental command post.

This wire net enabled the liaison officers with the infantry battalions to speak through normal channels to all elements of the infantry regiment, also to all elements of the artillery battalions. The direct lines, and with the tie-in with the forward observer lines permitted liaison officers to speak through direct channels with the artillery fire direction center and the forward observer or observers operating in their

sector. It might be noted here that it was a tremendous job to maintain this communication net with the personnel and equipment provided; but in more cases than not, it was these additional lines of communications which carried the burden.

With reference to the radio net, the normal allocation of radio sets was followed. Starting with the fire direction center, the base set employed was a SCR-608. Each liaison section operated with a SCR-610. As previously mentioned, the command liaison officer operated with a SCR-608.

The battalion was assigned 2 channels upon which to operate; one of these channels was utilized as a division artillery channel. Therefore, the battalion in effect only had a single channel to operate as a fire mission channel from ground observed, or conducted fire missions. Therefore it was necessary that all liaison radios and forward observers radios operate on the same channel. This required of course, the development of code prefixes to precede all messages and a strict compliance with the designated priorities of messages. At first blush it would appear that this would complicate matters to the extent that very little would get through except mumbled and jumbled messages. However, this was not the case. The operators soon learned that through necessity, a great number of people had to use the same channels and that it took a very few seconds to transmit the short messages that normally came over these sets. In spite of the success that was achieved by the application of strict radio discipline, it would certainly be desirable to have an artillery liaison radio channel in addition to the channel used by forward observers. In situations where the forward observers lost radio communications with the base set, the liaison officer's radio set acted as a relay station. On many occasions the command liaison set functioned as a forward radio terminal. This relay system was found to be a "life-saver" at times, particularly over terrain where hill masses blocked radio transmission.

The original concept of the function of a liaison officer prior to the entry into combat in the past war fell far short of exploiting the full capabilities of this section in the furtherance of the effectent employment of the infantry artillery team. It is not difficult to recall in the early days of the rapid expansion of the armed forces just prior to the Pearl Harbor Incident that the liaison officers which were assigned to headquarters and headquarters battery in a field artillery battalion running back and forth to the infantry regimental headquarters securing information from the infantry relative to friendly troop dispositions and proposed plans leaving little or no information relative to the artillery's capabilities or limitations, and participating in the infantry's planning not at all.

During this operation it was soon discovered that the liaison organization was perhaps the most important agency at the disposal of the artillery battalion commander to assist both he and the infantry regimental commander in the absolute coordination of planning, and the execution of plans for the successful accomplishment of the assigned mission.

Beginning with the alert order received by the infantry regiment for an operation, the infantry regimental commander and the command liaison officer together went over the full scope of the operation and the overall plan with respect to the artillery support required. In some instances the detailed plans of the infantry regiment were based on the capabilities of the artillery . It is easy to see that solid judgment is required at this point. The command liaison officer is charged with the responsibility of coordinating the activities of the liaison officers with the infantry battalions. The overall plan and such details as effect the artillery was given to the battalion liaison officers. In the preparation of the infantry battalion commander's plan for the execution of his assigned mission, the artillery liaison officer played his porportionate part, and it is at this point where in compliance with the artillery battalion commander's directives, the artillery fire support plan begins to shape up.

The procedure to develop this plan and to dovetail it into the infantry plan to meet the desires requirements was as follows: The artillery liaison officer, after learning the plan of the battalion, would develop a fire plan which he determined in conjunction with the infantry battalion commander would best support the action of that battalion. This plan would then be gone over and perfected, such changes being made as deemed necessary or profitable in view of recommendations and desires as expressed by the company commanders of the battalion. When this battalion plan was completed it was forwarded by each of the battalion liaison officers involved in the action, to the command liaison officer at regimental headquarters. Here the battalion plans would be gone over by the infantry regimental commander and the command liaison officer and the three coordinated; the undersirable portions of each eliminated and the three plans dovetailed together constituting the plan to support the regiment.

During the time this process is progressing, the artillery battalion S-3 is also preparing a support plan considering the probable requirements, of the infantry regiment and also the requirements as indicated by the division artillery commander, to include the plan for the support of the action by corps artillery in his sector. Upon these plans -- the one from the infantry regiment and the one prepared at the artillery fire direction center are used as the basis to develop the final artillery fire support plan for the operation. This plan then is disseminated through the artillery liaison channels and command channels, down to and including the infantry company commanders.

This procedure appears to be a considerable amount of work, and time consuming,. However, all of the preparation from the artillery forward to include even the infantry company commander is progressing simultaneously, and actually takes less time to arrive at a complete plan than the formulation of the plan exclusively by the field artillery battalion staff.

The question might be raised, at least in your minds, at this point, where and what is the artillery battalion commander doing during this plan phase. I think perhaps that the final approval of a highly successful fire support plan will indicate where the artillery battalion commander was and what he was

doing during the preparation of this plan, and to revert to somewhat of a travelogue probably would run something like this: Upon returning from a reconnaissance made in anticipation of such an alert order being received, he has informed his staff of the results of his reconnaissance, has directed them to keep in constant contact with division artillery and to proceed with the preparation of fire support plans based on the information received. His next stop will be the infantry regimental headquarters where he holds a conference with his command liaison officer and more times than not sets in with the infantry regimental commander and staff on the initial discussion of the proposed operation, gives any advice necessary to his representative and such as is desired by the infantry regimental commander at that time.

His next stop will be at the infantry battalion command post or wherever he may find his liaison officer and the infantry battalion commander. Here he observes the work of his liaison officer and offers such advice and assistance as desired by the infantry battalion commander or that he feels is pertinent.

His next stop will be at one or more of the forward observer positions. Here the company commander will likely be encountered and the very best of information can be secured. To steal a phrase popular at the Command and General Staff College: "Direct from the horses mouth". At the completion of this round, although time-consuming, worth more than gold can buy, a short stop by the fire direction center is made informing his staff of the results of his tour, a conference with the division artillery commander is now in order. At this time the information garnered along the line is covered and those portions which might have been forwarded to the division artillery commander from points along the route are verified as still current or such changes as may have occurred are discussed.

By this time the artillery battalion commander has in his possession all of the available information relative to the proposed action and is familiar with the general plan of all elements of the command and is now and only now in a position to determine the quality of the fire plan as prepared.

The process as described here is a continuous process and is not actually all inclusive. With changing situations there must of necessity be alternate plans prepared in conjunction with any operation. This requires continuous repetitions of these processes either in whole or in part.

A field artillery fire support plan can only be called final and complete at the time the last round on the last concentration in the plan has been fired.

CONCLUSION (ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM)

1. The Liaison Officer, both with the Infantry Battalion and Regiment is an operational link in the preparation and execution of the artillery fire support plan.
2. That it is necessary for maximum operational efficiency to maintain a Liaison Officer with the Infantry Regimental Headquarters at all times as well as the Infantry Battalion.
3. That the policies and procedures as layed down in FM 6-40 are sound, and flexible enough to permit expansion to fit any given situation.
4. That the Table of Organization and Equipment should provide: one additional liaison party complete with equipment.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons to be learned from this operation are:

1. The Artillery Battalion Commander cannot be with the Infantry Regimental Commander at all times when plans are being prepared. He must have a representative to perform this function.
2. A Command Liaison Officer should be of Field grade. It is necessary to have an officer of wide experience to advise with the Infantry Regimental Commander in the preparation of plans in order to maintain the efficiency of the Artillery Battalion, and the confidence of the Infantry Regimental Commander and staff.
3. There is no substitute for team work. A full understanding and appreciation by both the Infantry Commander and Staff, and the Artillery Commander and Staff, that both arms are going down the same road together, each contributing its part in a mutual undertaking, will go far in assuring maximum efficiency in the employment of this great team's Combined Arms.

