



(U.S. Army photo by Paolo Bovo taken Feb. 1, 2020) U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Felicia D. Rodriguez, 173rd Brigade Support Battalion, 173rd Airborne Brigade, briefs paratroopers on the planned operations during Exercise Lipizzaner VI at Pocek Range in Postojna, Slovenia, Feb. 1, 2020.

Is it Time for an Operations MOS?

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Noncommissioned officers (NCOs) lead, train, and execute missions in the U.S. Army with skill and precision, yet the education and training of the enlisted force in the operations field is not standardized. To improve mission readiness, the Army would benefit by establishing an enlisted military occupational specialty (MOS) specializing in operations.

Background

Currently, the U.S. Army does not have a career path dedicated to operations specifically. Typically, NCOs, who comprise the staff sections of most echelons and serve in a position different from their primary MOS, are selected by a command sergeant major who

determines the placement of NCOs in the operations section, by managing the talent and selecting individuals based on mission criteria. But the efficiency of operations within the section may degrade when NCOs are placed in unfamiliar roles and lack experience in an operations environment. Considering the influence a staff section has on mission success, placing trained and qualified NCOs within critical positions creates a more effective operational process.

The Problem

Within a command group, the purpose of a staff is to support the commander's decision-making process. According to *Field Manual 6-0: Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*, "In operations, effective

mission command requires continuous close coordination, synchronization, and information sharing across staff sections. To promote this, commanders cross-functionally organize elements of staff sections in command posts” (Department of the Army, 2014, p. 1-1) The description does not distinguish between officer or NCO, it defines staff as a *team*. But there are two large obstacles when selecting and introducing an NCO to the operations section — *talent management* and *professional education*.

Talent Management

U.S. Army Human Resources Command (HRC) is responsible for talent management throughout the Army. However, when HRC places NCOs on assignment, the responsibility of talent management is often relegated to the senior NCOs of the gaining organization. At the battalion level, the command sergeant major reviews the records of NCOs, including performance and potential, and decides where the NCO best serves in the organization. In *Talent Management Concept of Operations for Force 2025 and Beyond*, “Talent management involves integrating various activities to generate a positive, synergistic effect on organizational outcomes and harness individual aptitudes for the mutual benefit of the individual and the organization” (Department of the Army, 2015, p. iv).



(U.S. Army photo by Gertrud Zach taken Jan. 9, 2020) U.S. Soldiers with 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division install a combat vehicle tactical engagement simulation system on a Bradley Fighting Vehicle at the 7th Army Training Command’s Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, Jan. 9, 2020.

Talent management is more than just filling an open requisition to meet the needs of the Army. Staff level NCOs must show a high level of critical thinking, problem-solving, and possess the ability to work with minimal guidance. They should also have some background knowledge of the duties they will perform. According to *FM 6-0*, “Staffs support and advise the commander within their area of expertise” (Department of the Army, 2014, p. 2-1). Issues at the unit level can occur when leadership is unwilling to give up dynamic performers or the command team improperly vets and selects their staff.

Education

NCOs within an organization may not possess the formal education required for the operations positions they fill. The reasoning may be operational tempo, funding, or possibly a lack of personnel management (South, 2017). An example of this may be a Digital Training and Management System (DTMS) manager who has not received the basic-level training for DTMS but still manages the system for the organization because the role is crucial. Another example may be a land and ammo NCO who is put in charge of the Range Facility Management Support System (RFMSS) but is not battle staff qualified, or is not properly trained to effectively operate RFMSS. Without formal and standardized

training, NCOs cannot be expected to operate their systems to their full potential. The same is true for operations.

The Solution

With the creation of an Operations MOS, NCOs can significantly enhance mission readiness by providing an organization with critical thinkers and planners that bring a crucial experience aspect to the operations process. Using the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTMLPF-P) model (Department of Defense, 2016) a non-materiel solution is possible requiring a change in organization, training, and education.



(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Micah Merrill taken Feb. 29, 2020) Brigade staff and commanders with the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division conduct an operational briefing during a training exercise at Fort Carson, Colo., Feb. 29, 2020.

Organization

With the establishment of a new Operations MOS, an organization becomes adequately staffed, more functional, and a combat force multiplier for the combatant commander. Within the guidelines of a new MOS, specific requirements must be established. For example: An NCO, at a minimum, must be a sergeant and have at least five years time in service (TIS) and two years time in grade (TIG). This requirement provides the Army with an experienced junior NCO willing to accept an operations career trajectory. This selection also offers a junior NCO the ability of mentorship through the ranks and broadening opportunities related to the operational field at many different levels throughout their career. To be considered for the operations MOS, the NCO either requests the path of operations or their leadership recommends them based on performance, interest, and potential.

A selection board from the Mission Command Center of Excellence, much like a centralized board, could outline the selection criteria and select the NCO based on a records review and packet requirements. The requirement could include letters of recommendation from two higher echelon commanders and senior NCOs communicating the level of proficiency and intelligence the NCO possesses. Other requirements could include a recent passing Army Physical Fitness Test or soon to be Army Combat Fitness Test (APFT/ACFT), compliant with *Army Regulation 600-9: The Army Body Composition Program*, a minimum 110 general technical (GT) score, and a security clearance. Additionally, candidates could submit a memorandum stating they understand

they are ineligible to serve in command positions. The NCO would then be sent to professional military education and additional courses to sharpen the skill set.

Training and Education

Once selected, the NCO would attend their initial advanced individual training (AIT). The training would focus on all aspects of staff responsibilities, including the military decision making process, eight-step training model, and commonly used operations systems. Based on the NCO's prior training, they either move to their first unit or attend supplementary schools. Sergeants

through sergeants first class would attend the Battle Staff NCO Course. Selected sergeants first class and master sergeants would attend the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

In regards to the SAMS course, Col. Kevin Benson (2018) stated, "SAMS graduates became highly regarded and highly sought-after assets by commanders who desired to elevate the level of sophistication in their planning shops" (p. 1). By allowing senior NCOs to attend SAMS, these highly qualified NCOs are now sought out by commanders to serve in their operations staff. Enlisted SAMS graduates within an operations staff bridge the knowledge gap between officer and NCO, establishing the NCO as a significant and competent mission planner.

Conclusion

To successfully achieve the commander's intent, an organization requires an efficient and competent staff. A well-balanced team consists of both officers and NCOs working in unison under an equivalent level of competence. According to *FM 3.0: Operations*, "In the future, large-scale combat operations against a peer threat will be much more demanding in terms of operational tempo and lethality" (Department of the Army, 2017, p. 1-3). Properly training NCOs disciplined in operational concepts under a new operations MOS would enhance any organization and ultimately provide overall effectiveness to a combatant commander. Standardizing the operations field ensures a high level of experience and training and benefits the Army as a whole in the advanced tech-heavy combat of future fights. ■

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