



Soldiers assigned to 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division conduct a rehearsal of concept drill for an upcoming battalion level attack during Exercise Bronco Rumble in Kahuku Training Area, Hawaii on Aug. 20, 2021. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Alan Brutus)

Have We Forgotten the Rehearsal?

By Maj. George Fust & MSG(S) Michael Vance

75th Ranger Regiment

The massive hangar buzzes with activity. On one end, a wall of screens displays the most current intelligence available with diligent staff officers hurriedly coordinating last minute details. On the other, equipment layouts and inventories are taking place. The occasional outburst from a motivated team leader momentarily turns heads but is quickly replaced by the hum of service members hustling toward a common goal: the simultaneous joint forcible entry of multiple objectives during a period of darkness. This is arguably one of the most complex of all operations requiring an aggregation of units and organizations to operate with complete synergy. But how is this effort synchronized to within

seconds? How are friction points identified and reduced during the planning process? The key to success, and the scenario highlighted above, is the rehearsal. This article will explain the history and importance of the rehearsal, how it can be improved, and what happens after.

The Rehearsal

Merriam Webster's Online Dictionary defines a rehearsal as a "private performance or practice session preparatory to a public appearance," or for military purposes, a practice run before the mission execution ("Rehearsal", n.d., para. 2). It's an essential element in identifying gaps in planning and identifying needed resources. Yet, rehearsals are often

shortened or skipped altogether in the name of optimizing the plan or providing additional time for resourcing. Without one, the plan misses an opportunity for coordination and synchronization.

Imagine a scenario where intelligence, fires, and effects operate independently of each other with only a written order or staff discussions to guide their action. The power of each is diminished and confusion will certainly surface. If entities synchronize efforts through the rehearsal process, their value to the operation will increase exponentially. Each will better understand the role of the other, and more importantly, how they function together. A good rehearsal reduces the time required to prosecute a target or deliver an effect based on intelligence.



U.S. Army Rangers of the 75th Ranger Regiment conduct field training for a unit TFT (Task Force Training) operation on Joint Base Lewis - McChord, Wa., Aug. 20, 2019. Rangers use this type of training to maintain a high level of mission readiness. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Garrett Shreffler)

The Rehearsal of Concept

One of the most well-known rehearsal types is the *Rehearsal of Concept*, or the “ROC drill.” A ROC drill brings in all relevant participants for a holistic observation of the plan. Returning to the hangar vignette, the ROC drill is the epicenter and biggest stressor besides actual mission execution. It is conducted on a large terrain model that includes all relevant operational graphics and other amplifying information. The ROC drill is a choreographed production where participants memorize their portion of the script. For audience members seated in the bleachers it is hard to imagine how such a well-orchestrated and confident plan will not succeed. This rehearsal style is closer in form to a confirmation brief than a traditional rehearsal. Where this style falls short is that it often becomes about the theatrical performance instead of the actual rehearsal



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Tasi Feleti, of Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, ties strings on a terrain model, in preparation of a combined arms rehearsal, Jan. 2, 2012, Forward Operating Base Connolly, Khogyani district, Nangarhar province, Afghanistan. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Trey Harvey)

itself. A memorized script isn’t particularly helpful when conditions change, which inevitably will in a combat environment.

How to Improve the ROC

If an organization is willing to invest the time and resources to execute a ROC drill, those involved in executing the plan should brief it. They should stand on the terrain model and speak to those with whom they will coordinate during mission execution. This is one of the last opportunities available to identify friction points and gaps. It provides a final opportunity to synergize all aspects of the plan. The audience should not remain passive. Their macro external perspective is invaluable relative to a staff member buried in the micro details. Yes, ROC drills at the regimental and higher levels are often endurance events that stress an already overworked staff; however, they must exercise self-discipline, it could mean the difference between everyone coming home alive or not.

Refining the Plan

Once participants conduct a rehearsal and identify friction points, the tasks following the rehearsal should refine the plan. For example, if cold-blood storage is too far away from the airfield where casualties will be evacuated, an alternative location should be identified and resourced. If the intelligence analysts are not operating in the same chat groups as the fires cell, the primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency communication (PACE) plan must be updated. The ROC drill is not the final step. Participating units must implement the refinements to maximize the benefit of the rehearsal and increase the chance for mission success.



UH-60 Blackhawks, from the Idaho Army National Guard's Detachment 1 1-168th Aviation Regiment and 1-183rd Aviation Regiment, land at the Saylor Creek Range, south of Mountain Home, Idaho, Oct. 21, 2021. The helicopters were supporting a training mission for U.S. Army Rangers, from the 2nd Battalion of the 75th Ranger Regiment. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Joshua C. Allmaras)

Doctrine

Army Doctrine Publication 5-0, The Operations Process, is the Army's handbook for rehearsal doctrine. It defines it as "a session in which the commander and staff or unit practices expected actions to improve performance during execution" (Department of the Army, 2019, p. 3-7). It goes on to explain their importance:

"Commanders use rehearsals to ensure staffs and subordinates understand the concept of operations and commander's intent. Rehearsals also allow leaders to practice synchronizing operations at times and places critical to mission accomplishment. Effective rehearsals imprint a mental picture of the sequence of the operation's key actions and improve mutual understanding among subordinate and supporting units and leaders." (Department of the Army, 2019, p. 3-7)

Among the most important rehearsal principles is fostering mutual understanding between all involved units. If all participants in an operation understand the actions of adjacent units, they can make better-informed decisions when modifications are inevitably required during execution. This concept is obvious in hindsight and yet we sometimes fail to commit adequate time to rehearsals.

Field Manual 6-0: Commander and Staff Organization and Operations provides a useful visual for comparing time, resources, and OPSEC relative to leader participation and understanding.

Conclusion

Regardless of an operation's complexity or type, rehearsals are critical to ensure mission success. We must give the same level of attention we give to rehearsing for a change of command ceremony, to a wet gap crossing, forward passage of lines, or airfield seizure. Rehearsals reduce anxiety and increase the chance of success. We owe our subordinates every opportunity to improve a plan prior to its execution. Make time for the rehearsal. ■

References

Department of the Army. (2019). *Army doctrine publication 5.0: The operations process*. https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN18126-ADP_5-0-000-WEB-3.pdf

Department of the Army. (2020). *Army techniques publication 5.0.2-1: Staff reference guide volume 1*. https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN34870-ATP_5-0.2-1-000-WEB-1.pdf

Department of the Army. (2022). *Field manual 6.0: Commander and staff organization and operations*. https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN35404-FM_6-0-000-WEB-1.pdf

Maj. George Fust, battalion operations officer, 75th Ranger Regiment, holds a master's degree in political science from Duke University and has published in a variety of publications.

Master Sgt. (select). Michael Vance, battalion operations sergeant major, 75th Ranger Regiment, served in every leadership position from team leader to operations sergeant major. He has participated in numerous deployments and crisis response operations..



<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

