

# how to Complete the Battle Staff Course

## Seven Steps to Success

By MSG Lloyd H. Davison

*The tactical operations center for Task Force 1-5 Armor was buzzing:*

*"Sir! Our scouts report some activity in our sector!"*

*"What kind, SSG Jones?"*

*"Hard to identify in this heavy fog and rain, sir."*

*"OK, but from our earlier intelligence reports there shouldn't be any enemy in our area of operation. What's the grid, SSG Jones?"*

*"It's NB524189, sir."*

*"What?! Check that grid again. According to our overlay, that's not even our sector for this operations order. Who plotted this overlay, SSG Jones?"*

Sound familiar? Could this scenario cause a major disaster such as fratricide?

As America's Army gets smaller and more technical, there's still a need for our noncommissioned officers to understand the complex inner workings of a battle staff while becoming a warfighter of the 21st century.

The Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officer Course is realistic, fast-paced and oriented to performance training. It teaches NCOs to work as members of a staff in a battalion and brigade maneuver unit. They learn to assist in managing the complex operations in various command posts.

There are seven major requirements or steps to successfully completing this demanding six-week course.

### Meet Weight Standards

The first requirement is the same for all Army schools: you *must* meet the weight standards in accordance with AR 600-9. This may sound like an easy requirement, but two to three students from nearly every class fail this requirement.

### Pass Record APFT

The second condition comes from TRADOC Message 11081650Z, dated March 1995, which states that you must pass a *record* Army Physical Fitness Test on day one. Again, this sounds like an easy requirement since we all take an APFT at least every six months; however, an average of one or two students fall victim to this each requirement as well.

### Complete Graphics and Overlays Block

The third requirement eliminates the highest number of students from the course — failure to complete the first block of instruction (22 hours in length). Approximately 40 percent of the entire FY 95 classes failed the first exam in Graphics and Overlays. Of those, 35 percent failed the retest, resulting in elimination from the course. The standards for this block of instruction come from FM 101-5-1. Some of the major reasons for Graphics and Overlays failures are:

- **Poor basic map reading skills.** Combined with limited ability to use the legend of a map, students aren't able to plot six-digit grid coordinates, causing

them to misplot symbols and control measures. This puzzles BSNCOOC instructors and staff since all of these tasks are Common Skill Levels 1 and 2.

- **Lack of attention to detail.** For example — failing to label the mandatory fields (role indicator, size indicator and unique designation).

- **Failure to interpret the operations order.** Students have trouble identifying surrounding units. This leads to incorrect labeling of phase lines, boundaries and other control measures.

- **Failure to use the recommended plotting sequence.** Students tend to draw unit symbols out of sequence, resulting in erasures, replots and redraws of various requirements. This causes them to lose valuable time during examinations.

- **Failure to double-check work.** Once a symbol is plotted, students should ask themselves a few questions: Do I have the mandatory fields correct? Does this symbol require a special-size indicator (task force or team) designation? What kind of unit is it? Is the unit mechanized, and if so, are they equipped with Bradley Fighting Vehicles?

### Complete Plans/Orders and Annexes Block

The fourth requirement is the Plans/Orders and Annexes block of instruction. This block is straight-forward; everything needed can be found in FMs 101-5 and 72-2. Students learn how to prepare a warning order, then follow it up with a brigade or battalion operations

last week to get on the plane). If you're a short-notice replacement, check with your schools NCO and find out if the individual you replaced has the welcome packet.

The Academics section of the Sergeants Major Academy sends out welcome packets to all MACOMs and other commands with numerous allocations. If you don't receive a packet within a reasonable amount of time after notification of course attendance, then call USASMA at (915) 568-8449 or DSN 978-8449 to request one from Mr. Jesse Arenas. He will either fax or mail a packet to you.

The Army has training material available through correspondence studies that will assist you in preparing to attend BSNCO. Some recommended sub-courses on graphics and overlays are in DA Pam 351-20, the Army Correspondence Course Program Catalog. Those sub-courses are FA8015 (Overlay Techniques), IT0588 (Prepare and Maintain Intelligence Situation Map and Associated Overlays), and SS0529 (Prepare Overlays).

As leaders, we must prepare our NCOs to perform the staff functions when the primary staff member is unavailable due to circumstances of the battlefield. (These positions are traditionally filled by commissioned officers). Under normal full-up staffing, these skills acquired will allow NCOs to improve the capabilities of the staff to perform to the levels required of the future battlefield.

If you prepare yourself ahead of time in the preceding seven requirements, along with the additional information provided in this article, then you, your unit and the United States Armed Forces will benefit. You will be a well-trained and highly-skilled warfighter of the 21st century.

For additional information on the Battle Staff Course, contact the following individuals: SGM Scott, Co C Commander, at DSN 978-9165 (the commercial prefix for all numbers is 915-568-); SGM Caudill, BSC Senior Instructor, at DSN 978-9191; or ISG Cortinas at DSN 978-9116. The fax number is DSN 978-8145.

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## Compassion, Yes Training Shortcuts, No

By 1SG Kip E. Kowalski

**W**hen a unit conducts nuclear, biological and chemical training in full MOPP gear during the summer, it may be uncomfortable. But, unless troops are at risk from hot weather, being uncomfortable isn't a reason to compromise training. Leaders who feel sorry for their troops and allow them to sneak around and remove their masks in training are setting them up for failure. The soldiers are apt to do the same in an actual chemical environment, risking injury or death. Remember, soldiers do in combat what they rehearse in training.

Another instance of troop care is physical training. Not ensuring soldiers get into shape during peacetime means they may not survive in combat—risking not only themselves, but other soldiers as well. Is it more humane to show compassion and allow shortcuts now, or to train them right so they will not die in combat?

As with the sweating NBC soldiers and the weak PT program, NCOs need to approach their careers with the same "get tough" attitude. When a promotion list comes out, it's always the case that many soldiers ask why they weren't selected. What the boards are looking for is outstanding performance in tough leadership positions. With sinking selection rates, boards not only are looking for outstanding NCOs, they are looking at what NCOs were accomplishing when they got the outstanding NCOER. Selection boards relate jobs like platoon sergeant, first sergeant and similar leadership positions as being the tough payoff positions.

NCOs can't sit back. They must aggressively pursue those "hard" leadership positions. Leaders also have an obligation to support worthy NCOs by putting them into those tough payoff jobs. Some NCOs evade these positions due to their lack of previous leadership experience or they are complacent and let someone else do the tough jobs. We all know NCOs who spend many years as instructors or on special duty working outside their MOS, going home every night on time. No mission's too complicated for them—as long as it's under controlled conditions—cool in the summer and warm in the winter. If we let these NCOs linger in the soft jobs, are we looking out for their future?

Soldiers who stay in these positions (and NCOs who let them stay) are being set up for non-selection, even though they know the possibility for promotion is remote. They're the first to ask, "Why wasn't I selected?"

Our responsibility to these NCOs is to show compassion for them and their careers. Place them in a job where professional development is obtainable. Teach them what that job is and encourage them to seek leadership challenges. Many NCOs, apprehensive about taking on these tough positions, perform well after being coerced. They just need to mature into the job. The number of NCOs with repetitive platoon or first sergeant tours who perform well in them, makes it obvious that there are more than enough positions to go around. Some NCOs feel comfortable doing them over and over again, after they've gotten the first successful tour under their belt. Commanders need to encourage their best NCOs to seek these high-risk, high-payoff positions and mentor them to develop them into promotable leaders. Sometimes commanders and leaders are either selfish in using soldiers or don't understand the effects they're having on NCO careers.

Examples include unit orderly room clerks and training NCOs. These positions are an extremely important part of a unit's operation, but can be definite career-blockers. Leaders need to rotate NCOs back to the line platoons. Share the wealth within the unit. Allow more soldiers the opportunity to experience the difficult duties.

Taking care of soldiers means helping NCOs find that tough job to keep them competitive. Keep in mind that units have jobs that are less than career-enhancing. Some times commanders must have a job accomplished, but they need to understand the effect it has on the NCO's career. Don't let NCOs overstay their welcome in these jobs.

Remember, promotion boards advance soldiers based on potential and by virtue of how well they perform in their MOS, not out of it. Selection boards also view overseas assignments favorably. Soldiers who have their fair share of tough overseas duty tend to have better career patterns, varied assignments, more leadership experience and higher selection rates. ■

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*Graduates of the Battle Staff NCO Course should have map skills down to a science, helping them succeed in field training exercises like this one.*

order with all appropriate annexes. They also learn how to use fragmentary orders to change missions when directed. They prepare their unit's orders for execution during the command post exercise. Only a few students have trouble here; but just as in Graphics and Overlays, it's attention to detail that poses problems.

### **Complete MI Block**

Requirement five is the Military Intelligence block of instruction. It was the second leading cause of failure next to Graphics and Overlays. The problem? Very few NCOs work in this area of discipline. Due to the complex terminology used during these lessons, BSNCO recommends students have a reading comprehension level of 10.1 or higher on their Test of Adult Basic Education before attending the course. The MI block helps the student get a better understanding of exactly what S-2 responsibilities and functions are. The student who has a basic understanding of opposing forces doctrine is a step ahead of oth-

ers during this block. Students complete practical exercises as three- to four-person teams during these lessons, using the small-group process. Attention to detail and being able to assimilate multiple documents into the decision-making process, requires the student to use all staff elements in processing and disseminating intelligence.

### **Complete Combat Service Support Block**

The sixth requirement is the Combat Service Support block. All NCOs have had some exposure to CSS in one form or another. They've fueled and fixed equipment since their first unit of assignment and have dealt with S-4 NCOs on numerous occasions. The bottom line is that few have trouble with CSS. Still, it requires attention to detail.

### **Complete 10-Minute Military Information Briefing**

The last requirement calls for the stu-

dent to conduct a 10-minute (plus or minus two minutes) military briefing. This is the same requirement each NCO encounters during NCOES courses.

Now that you know the seven major steps for successful completion of the Battle Staff Course, you, your unit commander and command sergeant major should take a vital interest in preparing NCOs for future course attendance.

A word of caution: some NCOs

and MOSes have no business being here. There are prerequisites — check AR 351-4! Selection of the correct NCO and MOS to attend the Battle Staff Course should be a well-thought out process.

Upon selection and notification to attend BSNCO, query your unit for a previous graduate and get with him or her. Have this graduate train and explain to you what they've learned. There have been approximately 4,700 graduates since this course started and if you're one of them, take time to pass on your Battle Staff skills to those selected to attend.

All units should have an Order of Merit List for attending the Battle Staff Course. All too often, we hear the same thing from NCOs who fail a major exam -- notification of attendance was short-fused, anywhere from one week to one month and there was little time to prepare.

Students also mention the fact that they never received a welcome packet (makes sense, if you just got notified) ▶