Needed for rapid deployment: a joint contingency CEOI

by Capt. Marilyn M. McAllister

Rapid deployment forces will fight as part of a joint task force (JTF) in future contingency operations. In the joint task force scenario, the commander-in-chief (CINC), JTF headquarters, service components, and Special Operations forces must be able to communicate with each other over single channel radio on or before D-Day in order to exchange critical intelligence, as well as operations and logistics information.

For JTF communications to be effective, frequencies among all the services must be coordinated. Additionally, radio nets, frequencies, and callsigns—for internal and external communications—must be disseminated to the lowest levels prior to deployment. Key frequencies and callsigns, including tactical air request, naval gunfire support, and link-up coordination, must be on board every ship, in every air wing, and with every Marine and Army maneuver element deploying into the objective area.

Publishing and distributing a joint communications electronics operation instruction (CEOI) that accomplishes this is a time consuming process. Past contingency operations have shown that in an actual no-notice crisis, there would not be sufficient time for the JTF J-6 or the CINC to develop a joint CEOI and distribute it to the levels requiring it—the units, ships, and aircraft engaged in the fighting.

Some elements involved in the Grenada operation did not receive the frequencies and callsigns they required prior to deployment. Frequencies and callsigns had to be coordinated after our forces arrived in Grenada, during the most critical phase of the battle. A joint contingency CEOI did not exist (and still does not exist) to support joint task force operations like Grenada.

Subsequent crisis actions have reemphasized our need for a joint contingency CEOI. In one instance, the 101st Airborne Division was alerted for possible deployment but never received any frequencies and callsigns. The division was preparing to issue their own CEOIs, with frequencies cleared only for Fort Campbell, Ky., when the operation was cancelled.

In October 1986, the XVIII Airborne Corps, Rangers, 12th Air Force, and 1st Special Operations Command participated in the joint exercise, Gold Thrust. For this exercise, a joint CEOI was developed containing nets, frequencies, and callsigns for all participants. The participants agreed that as a result of the joint CEOI, external communications were the best they had ever experienced.

Using the Gold Thrust joint CEOI as a model, the XVIII Airborne Corps, in coordination with CINCLANT, CENTCOM, the Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and 1st SOCOM, has developed the data base for a joint contingency CEOI for rapid deployment operations. This data base contains all types of single channel nets, frequencies (FM, HF SSB voice, RATT, TACSAT, UHF, VHF AM), and callsigns for rapid deployment forces in all the services. The data base is layered as follows:

- The CINC/JTF layer contains nets, frequencies, and callsigns for the CINC, JTF, Marines, Air Force, Navy, Air Force, and Special Operations.
- The joint air support layer provides ABCCC, AWACS, TAC, MAC, naval air, and search and rescue frequencies and callsigns.
- The Special Operations layer contains callsigns and frequencies for Army, Navy, and Air Force Special Operation and Special Operations Force.
- The naval gunfire support layer lists naval gunfire support and ANGLICO company frequencies and callsigns.
- The Marine forces layer provides frequencies and callsigns for the XVIII Airborne Corps, 82nd Airborne division, 101st Airborne Division, 24th Infantry Division, 7th Infantry Division, 18th FA, 20th Engineering Brigade, 525th MI Brigade, 35th Signal Brigade, 1st COSCOM, 16th MP Brigade, and 58th ATC Battalion, all the way down to platoon level.
- The suffixes and expanders list suffixes and expanders to be used by all the services.
- The supplemental layer contains challenges and passwords, emergency signals, smoke and pyrotechnic signals, MEDEVAC procedures, AWACS procedures, etc., to be used by all services.

At the March 1987 Intertheater Command, Control, and Communications COMSEC Package (IC3CP) Conference, the XVIII Airborne Corps presented three proposals.

- All frequencies and callsigns should be frozen during the initial deployment. This would allow communications stability to develop in the objective area before daily changes begin.
- Each CINC should adopt the JCEOI data base XVIII Airborne Corps has developed, and preassign frequencies and callsigns to be used by rapid deployment forces for contingency operations in their area of operations.
- The joint contingency CEOI(s) should be tied to AKAI-18 in the IC3 package, and its distribution parallel with that of the IC3. This will insure that the document is already in the required COMSEC accounts of all the services before units are alerted for actual deployment. It would be available on board Navy ships, in air wings, in Marine, Army, JTF, and CINC communication security accounts.

These proposals are under consideration by the CINCs. We believe that adoption, publication, and distribution of the joint contingency CEOI will greatly enhance rapid deployment joint communications.

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