

By Colonel Glenn A. Henke

The Problem

Every Army command team faces the same challenge: how to manage the ceaseless onslaught of tasks that come from higher headquarters while conducting your own training and operations. Battery, company, and troop commanders are the leaders who direct actual Soldiers to execute missions dreamed up by their higher headquarters, all the way from the Department of Defense on down. To make matters more unfair, every commander above them has a staff to organize these tasks. A battery has the commander, 1SG, XO, and perhaps a training room NCO.

Battery command teams frequently mention this challenge as the most significant issue preventing them from leading effectively. This is exacerbated when higher headquarters fail to observe established training lock-in windows, or when they task a unit for more than they can physically execute. This challenge accumulates at each echelon, so a battery that is lucky enough to have a perfect battalion staff is not protected if the brigade or division staffs are not equally disciplined. Even when the higher headquarters spread tasks equitably in a timely manner, allowing units time to plan, the sheer volume can overwhelm the best training plan.

Leaders at the battery can manage this challenge by using planning horizons and applying fundamental Army processes, specifically the 8 Step Training Model and Troop Leading Procedures. This approach is more likely to succeed than fighting the battalion over every tasking. Commanders can't control what happens, but they can control how they deal with what happens.

Planning Horizons

Leaders who have served on higher echelon staffs are probably familiar with the division of planning responsibilities along three planning horizons. These planning horizons are current operations (CUOPS), future operations (FUOPS), and future plans (FUPLANS). The G33 leads CUOPS (0 to 72-96 hours), which includes operations for the next three days and

any rapid planning to deal with whatever arises at that time. The G35 leads FUOPS (72 hours to 60-90 days) and they plan over a period of weeks and sometimes months. Once a plan is ready for execution they hand it off to G33. The G5 leads FUPLANS, who focuses on anything past 60-90 days along with plans that serve as a framework for plans developed by the G35 (like a campaign plan).

The important point is not the planning horizons but how large staffs dedicate teams to focus on each distinct period. Some people may span horizons, like a G35 election planner who temporarily moves to CUOPS during host nation elections. The CG and DCGs keep a broad view of the entire planning enterprise while the Chief of Staff and G3 manage the transitions between each planning horizon.



Figure 1: Notional Planning Horizons

Batteries can apply this model to their own operations and training management. Although batteries can't dedicate staff to these planning horizons, organizing small unit planning around these time frames can be useful. For a battery, CUOPS is T+0 (the training week), FUOPS is T+1 to T+8, and FUPLANS is T+9 and beyond. At the battery level, I recommend you think 6 months out for FUPLANS. Your battalion should focus out three quarters, and the brigade should look a year out. This doesn't mean you've planned everything six months in advance; it just means you're thinking about the future in a

systemic way.

Battery-Level Planning Horizons

The use of planning horizons helps you avoid the gravitational pull of current operations. While commanders sometimes find themselves exclusively focused on current operations, this needs to be the exception, even in combat. Learning how to place yourself at the decisive point is fundamental to the art of command. So is knowing when to step back and take a broad view of your operations. The obvious question is “if not the commander, then who?” The Army isn’t going to give you a staff, so you have to employ the leaders you already have. Fortunately, many of your subordinates’ responsibilities align neatly with the planning horizons.

For CUOPS, only dedicate the training room or command post NCO (assuming you have one). Everybody else can surge to CUOPS as required (remember: we’re talking about planning, not execution). Your training room is the canary in the coal mine that informs you when you receive a mission inside the CUOPS planning horizon, but they don’t do this alone.

Platoon sergeants, the maintenance team, and your supply sergeant make up the next line of defense. They span both CUOPS and FUOPS, and their responsibilities in executing the 8-step training model fit neatly here. This is particularly true for platoon sergeants, who coordinate resources, certify leaders to conduct training, and choose individual tasks supporting the collective tasks selected by the platoon leader. CUOPS is also where you plan the messy details of Soldier care, like medical appointments. Maintenance teams have similar responsibilities in resourcing equipment services planned by platoon leaders.

Platoon leaders are optimally suited for FUOPS. While they’re still responsible for leading their platoons within the CUOPS horizon, their doctrinal planning responsibilities reside in T+1 to T+8. Sometimes they will participate in CUOPS planning, but a platoon leader who bivouacs in T+0 is not very useful to their Soldiers or the platoon sergeant.

The Battery XO should also be kept out of CUOPS, unless necessary. The XO should focus on the FUOPS planning horizon and the first few months of the FUPLANS horizon. This is where you forecast for things like ranges, land, and ammunition; units that dedicate their XO to CUOPS struggle with these things. These units are also terrible at routine and predictable tasks like awards, evaluations, and training schedules.

The battery 1SG and commander are the only positions we haven't assigned a planning horizon. I recommend a division of labor. Your 1SG should focus on FUOPS, surge to CUOPS as required, and dabble in FUPLANS as an expert adviser. The 1SG is the leader who is most susceptible to the gravitational pull of CUOPS, and in some cases this is exactly where you need the 1SG. As a rule, the 1SG should oversee and mentor platoon sergeants in the FUOPS window to ensure training is resourced and ready to execute by T+0. The most overlooked planning in the FUOPS horizon is unit manning as Soldiers depart and leave holes in the organization. The 1SG must own this responsibility.

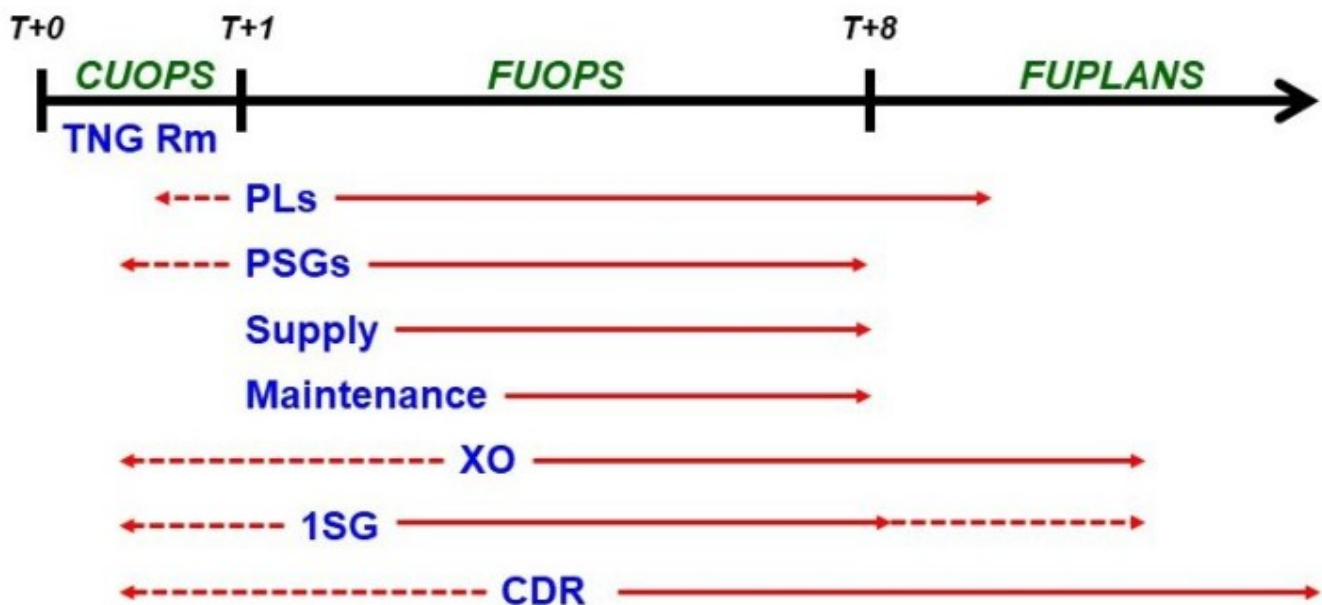


Figure 2: Suggested Battery Planning Horizons

The battery commander's share of this division of labor is the latter half of FUOPS and all of FUPLANS. Successful commanders take their units where they need to go, and this only happens when commanders mentally live in the future. That great FTX you want to execute starts in FUPLANS, not FUOPS. The commander is still responsible for all planning horizons, and a focus on the future is not a free pass to ignore the present. Commanders must surge to CUOPS when necessary, particularly when decisions are required. I merely argue that the commander is the one person in the battery best suited to focus systemically on the future.

What You Do Matters

The way you organize your planning is only half of the problem. The perfect organization can't help you if you aren't doing the right things inside these planning horizons. Fortunately, the answer is not that complicated. Use the 8 Step Training Model for things *you* want to do (i.e. your training plans), and use Troop Leading Procedures for things you are *directed* to execute inside the CUOPS or FUOPS horizons. I won't discuss the 8 Step Training Model, but I will cover Troop Leading Procedures. Commanders can manage the taskings that crush hopes and dreams, using this model.

While most units execute Troop Leading Procedures with varying degrees of success, the critical factor is the duration between Step 1 (Receive the Mission) and Step 2 (Make a Tentative Plan). Your struggle is directly proportional to this length of time. If you get the tasking and then wait until "later" to make a plan, you will be pulled into CUOPS when the crisis arises. While higher headquarters bear responsibility for last-minute tasks, batteries can't complain when they receive a task in time but simply don't make a decision or a plan.

Here's an example: As a battery commander, I once failed to provide Bradley range support to another battery during our Iraq train-up because I waited too long to make a

plan. The battalion sent the order with about 30 days to execute, but I didn't make a plan until a week before execution. I couldn't blame the battalion. After this event, we created a tracker to capture these types of tasks as soon as we received them.

Here's a second example. The Army requires flu shots annually and many Soldiers receive them in the last few weeks of the year as higher headquarters scrutinize MEDPROS. Units then surge to conduct "shot rodeos," often at the expense of scheduled training. Why was anybody surprised by an annual requirement, and why wasn't this put on the training plan back in August? You can't blame your battalion for your failure to anticipate an annual requirement.

Make a tentative plan and make it as quickly as possible. Put the requirement on a sign and hang it right next to the "Who Else Needs to Know?" banner in your command post. If nothing else, put it on a tracker everybody looks at routinely. There are countless ways to track requirements, including Outlook calendars, dry erase boards, paper calendars on desks, and so on. Then use the battery training meeting as the integrating event that allows the commander to see the breadth of the unit operations. The training meeting is where you leverage planning horizons by assigning the tasks to the people who focus on those planning horizons. It will also help you to know when to surge yourself, the XO, and 1SG into CUOPS, such as when quick decisions are required. A unit that conducts training meetings with a calendar, task tracker, and a running troop to task list has a greater chance of success.

Planning horizons can also help you diagnose training management problems. In the flu shot example, the problem was in the FUPLANS horizon, which points to an issue with long term planning and training meetings. Likewise, a platoon that comes up with great training ideas but fails to develop the detailed plans to make the training possible may have a platoon sergeant overly focused on CUOPS. The training meeting is where you diagnose these problems.

As a battery commander, I had a dry erase board called the Range Card. I divided it into 50-meter targets (This Week), 100-meter targets (This Month), and 200-meter targets (The Future). Eventually, I adapted this into a PowerPoint slide I've used with great success in every job since then, but the fundamental product is the same as the dry erase board in Tikrit. The important thing is not the Range Card itself but the process of creating it because it forces me to think about the future in a routine and systemic way.

It's Art, Not Science

Battery-level commands come in countless shapes and sizes and there are many ways to organize them for success. Regardless of the diversity of units, planning horizons still exist even if you don't recognize them explicitly. No single person can think deeply about all these horizons simultaneously, no matter how talented. While the commander is ultimately responsible, they can't do it alone. Commanders must organize their units to address these planning horizons and use the 8-Step Training Model and Troop Leading Procedures to lead effectively through the onslaught of tasks from their higher headquarters.

COL Glenn A. Henke is a U.S. Army officer and the commander of an air defense artillery brigade. The opinions expressed in this article are his and do not necessarily represent the official position of any agency of the U.S. Government.

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