



Simplifying the Heavy Brigade/ Task Force Operations Order

by Captain Brian Hayes

A disturbing trend has gripped today's heavy force — an increasingly long and complicated operations order (OPORD). Leaders must reverse this trend. Clear, concise operations orders are essential if we are to consistently plan and fight effectively under combat conditions. Fortunately, current doctrine already provides effective solutions to this problem.

The Challenge

A long, complicated OPORD has the following disadvantages:

- **Time.** A complex OPORD takes a great deal of time to produce. Doctrinally, this is an inherent disadvantage. Leaders owe their subordinates at least two-thirds of available planning time. The more time spent on OPORD production means less time for subordinates.

- **Potential for confusion.** If an order is repetitive, it wastes production time. If it is contradictory, it creates other problems. The longer and more complicated an order, the more likely it is to contain inconsistencies. A good rule of thumb to prevent such inconsistencies is if something is in the body of the order do not put it in an annex. The same holds true for the reverse — say what needs to be said once.

- **Challenges of planning in a field environment/continuous operations.** The sterile classroom environments where military schools teach planning gives leaders and staffs a false sense of security about producing an order in the field.

Most planning exercises assume that the commander and entrenchment staff will be able to assemble and work to produce an order according to an approved timeline. The combat training center

battle rhythm reinforces this view. However, this assumes that no enemy contact or other significant issue demands their attention elsewhere. When the realities of continuous operations are factored in, the likelihood is that deliberate planning is the exception and not the rule.

Producing schoolhouse-quality orders and matrices in a realistic timeframe requires computers, printers, and copiers. The demands of office equipment, such as electricity and shelter, push units to establish larger, less mobile, and less secure command posts. Noise and light signatures increase when generators, lights, and computers run at all hours. Tactical operations centers (TOCs) that have to wire offices every time they jump tend to jump less often, and are consequently easier to locate and destroy. If the enemy attacks, the TOC's best option for security (displacement) must now be balanced against losing the unit's ability to plan if it abandons its office equipment.

Moreover, at some point, whether due to enemy action, weather, maintenance, or supply, computer equipment will fail. On one hand, excessively long orders contribute to computer failure. Each page through a printer or copier takes another bit of ink off the ribbon, or another copy off of the machine's life expectancy. What is more important, however, is that units must prepare to produce effective orders when technology breaks. This means going back to pens, markers, and carbon paper, which makes it impossible to produce anything but concise, simple OPORDs. Planners must be ready to write them; subordinates must be accustomed to putting them into practice. Leaders must embrace simple orders during training to be prepared for them in combat.

Where We Are: OPORD NAVAJO:

To best see how long and complex OPORDs have become accepted practice, consider the school solution. For example, OPORD NAVAJO is 22 pages long without annexes. The Field Artillery Captains' Career Course uses it to train prospective battalion fire support officers on fire support planning in the heavy brigade offense.

The discussion below is organized as issue, example from OPORD NAVAJO, and discussion.

Issue 1. Task organization wastes space by detailing habitual/standard operating procedure (SOP) assignments.

OPORD NAVAJO:

TF 1-2

1-2 AR (-)
B/1-78 MECH
C/1-78 MECH
1/A/1-441 ADA (Linebacker)(DS)
A/501 EN (DS)
1/1/ (Smk Plt) 52 Cml Co (2xM1059)
FSE 1-40 FA
COLT 1, 6
TACP

TF 1-78

1-78 MECH(-)
A/1-2 AR
A/1-3 AR
3/A/1-441 ADA (Linebacker)(DS)
C/501 EN (DS)
FSE 1-40 FA
COLT 3
TACP

TF 1-3

1-3 AR (-)
D/1-78 MECH
2/A/1-441 ADA (Linebacker)(DS)
B/501 EN (DS)
1/1/ (Smk Plt) 5-5 Cml Co (2xM1059)
FSE 1-40 FA
COLT 2
TACP

BCT CONTROL

1-40 FA (155, SP M109A6)(DS)
1/C/1-21 FA (Q-36, TAB)
1-616 FA (155, SP M109A5) (R 1-40 FA):
DNE 70% CSR, O/O GS
A/1-441 ADA (-)(Linebacker)(DS)
501 ENG(-)(DS)
3/52 CML (-) (Decon)(DS)
A/123 MI (DS)
FSE 1-40 FA
COLTs 4, 5
1st FSB
1/A/52 MP
1/A/52 SIG TF 1-78
TACP

Discussion. It is essential to list changes to the task organization in detail. Many attachments, however, habitually fight with the same organization. For example, a maneuver brigade will typically have the same associated direct support artillery battalion. The direct support battalion provides a fire support element, and the Air Force a tactical air control party, to each supported maneuver task force. Each tank/mechanized battalion will have an attached engineer company, and so on.

Task force commanders and staff do not need to be told that their people are still around — they just need to know if the brigade commander wants to send them somewhere. Save time and space by omitting any task organization that is part of SOP.

Issue 2. The “Enemy forces” subparagraph and/or Annex B contain extraneous raw information, not intelligence. For example:

“OPORD NAVAJO:

SITUATION

1. Enemy forces.
- (2) Capabilities.

(a) The T-80UM is equipped with the AT-11 antitank guided missile (ATGM) (5,000m range); 125mm smoothbore gun (armor-piercing, fin-stabilized, discarding sabot (APFSDS) 2,500m, APFSDS-DU 3,200m), and the Agava M1 fire control system with integrated Buran-PA thermal imaging device (3,600m range).

(b) The BMP-2 is equipped with the AT-5b Spandrel ATGM (4,000m range) and a 30mm stabilized auto-cannon (2,500m range). This version of the BMP does not contain a thermal sight. The BTR-80 is equipped with a 30mm main gun with an armor-piercing tracker range of 2,000m and a high explosive incendiary range of 4,000m.

(3) Enemy COAs.

The companies doctrinally deploy 3,000m in width and 1,000m in depth, based on terrain. Platoons defend a frontage of 800 meters with 100 to 200 meters between tanks, again based on the terrain. Each company will deploy from one to three squad-sized combat security outposts within direct fire range of the tank company defense. The 127th Mechanized Infantry Brigade (MIBR) will construct fire sacks, integrating natural and man-made obstacles in front of the platoon position, a belt at 3,000 meters (two-thirds range of AT weapons). The 127th MIBR may use a reserve slope defense if the terrain permits. The 41st Military Intelligence Detachment (MID) can also employ remote antiarmor mine systems (RAAMS)-type minefields. At a minimum, there should be 1 x 2S6 vicinity each company position. Forward of the BMP company defenses (3 to 5kms, based on terrain), elements of the reconnaissance companies (four to six OPs, BMP/BRDM across the BCT zone) will be deployed.”

Discussion. By definition, intelligence is the finished product of evaluation, integration, and analysis.¹ In contrast, the above excerpt is merely raw information.

Reference material on threat capabilities and doctrine has its place, but it does not belong in the OPORD. A good task force S2 will have this information on hand and provide it to task force company commanders as necessary. In addition, the usefulness of this type of information at company level and below is vastly overrated. Companies and platoons execute battle drills. Does a platoon leader bring his platoon on line differently, or a tank commander engage a T-80U differently because they know that it has an M1 Agava fire control system?

S2s frequently publish excess information in other areas as well. General country-study information, such as detail on major rivers or mountains and the ethnic make-up of populations, is very useful for planning in the initial stages of a campaign. However, this information does not change and does not need to be included in tactical OPORDs after arriving in theater. Weather and light data can also be driven to pointless levels of detail. Knowing about a thunderstorm tomorrow is useful — knowing the average rainfall for the month of April in the area of operation is probably not useful. Similarly, if the sun rose at 0615 hours today, it will rise around the same time tomorrow, give or take a few minutes.

Enemy forces paragraphs and Annex B need to focus on intelligence products that are useful to task force commanders planning tactical operations.

Issue 3. Mission and Execution paragraphs are too long and repetitive.

“OPORD NAVAJO:

2. MISSION. 1st Brigade Combat Team (BCT), division supporting effort, attacks NLT 080400 XXX YY to destroy enemy forces in zone, and reestablish forward line of own troops (FLOT) at Phase Line (PL) FLORENCE to protect the eastern flank of 2d BCT.

3. EXECUTION.

INTENT: 1st BCT attacks to destroy enemy forces in zone and secures Objective (OBJ) GREEK and OBJ ATHENS. O/O 1st



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BCT continues its attack to destroy the enemy in zone and establishes a defense along PL FLORENCE. The endstate for the operation is 1st BCT occupying defensive positions along PL FLORENCE prior to the arrival of the 17th Tank Division (TD).

a. Concept of the operation. See Annex C (operations overlay).

1st BCT attacks with two task forces abreast, with the third task force conducting a follow and assume mission. This attack must be swift and violent to quickly destroy the enemy in zone and seize key terrain to support the commitment of the BCT reserve into the attack. The BCT reserve rapidly passes forward to destroy remaining enemy forces vicinity OBJ TROY, and establishes defensive positions along PL FLORENCE before the arrival of second echelon enemy forces. The BCT must be ready to defend along PL FLORENCE prior to the arrival of the 17th TD.”

Discussion. Notice the repetitiveness and excessive wording in this excerpt — 198 words and 20 lines of text. Examples include:

- The BCT will attack in zone — mentioned three times.
- The BCT will defend along PL FLORENCE — mentioned four times.
- The attack will be swift and violent — shouldn’t all attacks be violent?
- We must seize key terrain — sounds like a good idea.

In contrast, consider the following two paragraphs:

“Mission: Attack NLT 080400 to destroy enemy in zone and reestablish FLOT along PL FLORENCE to protect 2 BCT eastern flank.

Execution: Attack w/2 task forces up and one back. O/O reserve task force passes forward, destroys enemy on OBJ TROY, and defends along PL FLORENCE. Intent is to be prepared for enemy 17th TD counterattack.”

These paragraphs express essentially the same information as the longer two listed above; however, they take up only 57 words and 6 lines of text. Effective graphics, rehearsals, and SOPs can make this an easy order to execute.

One of the more ridiculous common statements is, “My intent is to complete the operation at 70 percent strength.” What does this mean? It certainly is not the commander’s goal that 30 percent of his force die, or that 30 percent of his vehicles be destroyed. Instead, is this intent what the commander expects to happen? If so, why say anything about it? This is another statement that does not belong in the OPORD.

Issue 4. Do not recap doctrine or SOP.

“OPORD NAVAJO:

3a. Concept of the operation. Each task force must be prepared to conduct a deliberate breach in zone but will bypass or conduct in stride breaches of obstacles whenever possible.

Discussion. This is absolutely true. It is also absolutely unnecessary, because doctrine has already addressed this very issue. “The force must attempt to cross any obstacles it encounters without loss of momentum by conducting in stride breaches. Lead security elements bypass or breach obstacles as quickly as possible to maintain the momentum of the movement.”²

Other examples:

- Seize key terrain — repeats Field Manual (FM) 3-0.
- Masking criteria — should be included in unit SOP.
- Evacuation criteria for damaged vehicles — should be SOP.
- Casualty evacuation procedures — should be SOP.

Where We Want to Be: VII Corps Field Order 18

Doctrine already provides potential solutions to simplify the OPORD. Every commander and staff officer should read and take to heart Appendix H to FM 101-5.³ This appendix clearly demonstrates that, contrary to popular belief, current doctrine encourages short, simple orders.

Appendix H contains Field Order 18 — the OPORD for the VII Corps exploitation from the Remagen bridgehead in World War II. Remember that OPORD NAVAJO, a brigade order, was 22 pages without annexes. Contrast it with Field Order 18 — a *corps* order for a complex operation, consisting entirely of a five-page base order, a sketch, a seven-page intelligence annex, a fire support annex, and an overlay.

FM 101-5 makes several important points about Field Order 18:

- Although brief and simple, it is complete and doctrinally correct.
- VII Corps produced the order under time pressure and in a combat environment.
- Oral orders, an overlay, experience, and good SOPs made the order effective.
- Subordinate commanders clearly understood the concept and executed effectively.⁴

As the introduction to Appendix H illustrates, a well-trained unit with a strong SOP can succeed in executing a complex operation based on a very simple order.⁵

Commanders and staff must be prepared to plan as VII Corps did in 1945 — in the field, in contact, and under time constraints. The most effective way to ensure success under these conditions is to produce orders that are as clear and concise as possible. By turning to the solutions already present in our doctrine — matrix orders, overlay orders, rehearsals, SOPs, and short written orders such as Field Order 18 — today's heavy brigades and task forces can ensure that they will fight and win on future battlefields.



Notes

¹U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), Washington, D.C., 14 June 2001, p. 11-8.

²FM 3-90, *Tactics*, GPO, Washington, D.C., 4 July 2001, p. 4-12.

³FM 101-5, *Staff Organization and Operations*, GPO, Washington, D.C., 31 May 1997, Appendix H.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*

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