

# Troop-Leading Procedures in the Austere Environment

by CPT V. Paul Brancato

The [troop-leading procedures](#) (TLPs) constitute the fundamental process in which Army organizations of troop size and smaller plan operations. TLPs follow a simple method troops and platoons can use, whether planning for training operations at their home base or conducting combat operations in theater.

The austere environment in which military units find themselves conducting combat operations presents a unique set of challenges to the planning process. Here, units will find a situation that is fundamentally antagonistic. In addition to the effects of terrain and weather, units must counter the effects of enemy forces on planning and operating. Also, leaders will not have hard structures with electricity available to support their planning. They will have to be able to conduct detailed planning without the use of computers and weatherproof structures.

Three steps of the TLPs that troops and platoons often struggle to perform correctly are the making of a tentative plan, the initiation of movement alongside reconnaissance, and supervision and refinement.

## The tentative plan

The third step – making a tentative plan – requires the leader to use the process of course of action (CoA) development. Troops and platoons will typically only generate one CoA, but if time allows, a leader may find it useful to create more than one.

Due to limited time, a leader may desire to delegate elements of his plan to others. Delegation can be a useful tool to distribute work; however, delegation compartmentalizes elements of the plan with the separate planners and requires synchronization so each planner can have a shared understanding of the whole plan. The troop command post already has many of the necessary products required for planning.

Following the steps of CoA development, the leader must first analyze his available forces and then brainstorm ideas of what he can execute with his available forces. Drawing his organization on butcher block with current strength can help the commander understand the combat power he has available.

The next step involves the assignment of a specific task to a specific subordinate unit. At this point, the leader can complete the concept of the operation and assign headquarters elements to control portions of the operation. At the troop and platoon levels, leaders will not likely be able create another headquarters, and the unit leader will most likely act as the only headquarters.

Now the leader can complete his CoA statement and sketch. In the austere environment, he'll most likely draw a statement and sketch on whatever notebook paper he has available. Regardless of his presentation's poor aesthetics, the leader will now be able to competently explain the basic idea of his plan.

## Movement and reconnaissance

The fourth TLP step is the initiation of movement, which will often be performed alongside of Step 5, reconnaissance. Once CoAs are made, leaders can begin to acquire supplies and synchronize assets so they can have the maximum combat power available during the mission. Reconnaissance allows leaders to have an idea of any changes or developments in the situation. Giving organizational leaders a clear task, purpose and intent will allow them to operate with little supervision.

The executive officer and first sergeant take charge of starting necessary movement. The executive officer analyzes the CoA's supply requirements and begins requisitioning supplies with the assistance of the supply sergeant, and plans for maintenance with the assistance of the team chief. The first sergeant supervises noncommissioned officers (NCOs) in their preparation of equipment for the mission and plans for any medical and administrative requirements with the assistance of the senior medic and training-room NCO.

During this time, commanders, platoon leaders and section leaders collect as much information about their area of operations as possible. The first, simplest and most readily available method of information collection to a troop or platoon is a map reconnaissance. Troops, however, will have the option to use their Ravens to conduct area reconnaissance and acquire intelligence updates from the troop intelligence-support team. Enemy and weather

updates from the intelligence officer will ease preparation of operation, as the enemy and weather timelines will affect the friendly timeline.

The fire-support officer will begin to build the fire support plan at this point. Collaborative planning among all these elements throughout this step is essential so the troop commander can synchronize his entire organization.

## **Supervising, refining**

The eighth step of the TLPs is supervising and refining. A key step in this phase is rehearsing the plan. Units often rehearse contingency plans such as actions on contact, but the rehearsal most important to synchronizing the operation is rehearsing the plan itself. At a minimum, units should rehearse their actions on objective. In an austere environment, the easiest rehearsals to perform are ones where leaders simply talk through the plan while looking at a map. This type of rehearsal does not require resources, is quiet and can quickly identify issues with the plan.

An often-overlooked aspect of a rehearsal is operational risk incurred by the rehearsal itself. While it is true that a more detailed and involved rehearsal creates a greater shared understanding, commanders must ensure that the risk of revelation to the enemy has been properly mitigated. Enemy reconnaissance is always watching, and a near-peer enemy will have remote piloted aircraft available to perform area reconnaissance on friendly formations. If not properly obfuscated, the rehearsal could forecast the operation to the enemy.

Another important part of the rehearsal is identification of major friction points. A good example is the amount of time needed for a recovery asset to reach a stuck vehicle. Talking through this point in the rehearsal may lead to a specific readiness-condition level for the recovery vehicle at a certain point in the operation.

Other key steps of this phase are the pre-combat checks (PCC) and pre-combat inspections (PCI). PCCs are performed by junior NCOs and are all-inclusive and ongoing. PCIs are performed by the unit leader and are restricted to mission-essential equipment. During the operations order (opord), the leader publishes a list of equipment he deems as essential to completing the mission, and he verifies that the equipment is operational and that its operator is capable of using it.

Throughout this phase, leaders will modify their plan through the use of fragmentary orders (frago) that change a part of the opord based on changes in the situation. These fragos are best delivered through a communication system, as they are typically small and do not require personal delivery.

The making of a tentative plan, the initiation of movement alongside of reconnaissance, and supervision and refinement are three steps of the TLPs that troops and platoons often struggle to perform while operating in an austere environment. Troops and platoons are more than capable of performing all the TLP steps while planning from their offices, but the struggle comes from performing the same level of detail while operating deep in the forest or desert where electricity and weather protection is not readily available. Analog systems such as butcher block, dry-erase boards and maps are some of the products that will support planning. Troops and platoons must have these products available so they can plan their operations at a detailed level.

*CPT Paul Brancato is the troop senior observer/controller/trainer (O/C/T) for Task Force (TF) 4, Operations Group, Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, LA. Previous assignments include serving as platoon senior O/C/T, TF 4, Operations Group, Fort Polk; S-4, TF 3-66 Armored Regiment (AR), Grafenwoehr, Germany; platoon leader, TF 3-66 AR, Grafenwoehr; and information-operations officer, TF 3-66 AR, Grafenwoehr. His military schooling includes Maneuver Captain's Career Course, Army Reconnaissance Course, Armor Basic Officer Leader Course, Observer Controller Course, Joint Firepower Course, Combatives Level II and the Airborne and Air Assault courses. CPT Brancato holds a bachelor's of science degree in biology from The Citadel (the Military College of South Carolina).*

## **Acronym Quick-Scan**

**AR** – armored regiment

**CoA** – course of action

**Frigo** – fragmentary order

**NCO** – noncommissioned officer

**O/C/T** – observer/controller/trainer

**Opord** – operations order

**PCC** – pre-combat checks

**PCI** – pre-combat inspections

**TF** – task force

**TLP** – troop-leading procedures