

• Provide more positive feedback. The new lieutenant wants to do well but does not know how and may be insecure. (An OER once a year is not enough.)

• Clearly define the new lieutenant's role in relation to that of the NCOs.

In addition to these suggestions, a thoughtful company commander can generate others that will work equally well for him. Above all else, he must

realize that the training of new lieutenants is one of his most critical responsibilities.

The results of this study should let other lieutenants know they are not alone in their feelings — that their peers experience the same difficulties. But more important, these results should help company commanders to define the needs of their new lieutenants and to work toward a more helpful training program for them.

Finally, the study may help senior commanders to a better understanding of their small unit leaders' problems.

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# SOPs That Work

**CAPTAIN PETER G. WILLIAMS**

Dog-eared SOPs in black three-ring binders can be found in orderly rooms throughout the world. Some of these unit SOPs are invaluable — others are almost useless. The difference lies in how carefully they were planned and compiled, and in how effectively they are used.

The classic purpose of a tactical SOP (according to Special Text 7-150, Operations) is "to standardize routine, recurring operational and combat service support procedures," procedures that always apply "except when modified by company order." But a unit's SOP can easily be used to accomplish many additional goals as well.

An SOP — a book of standing operating procedures — is, or should be, a written record of how a unit goes about accomplishing its mission. A good one has several advantages: It can quickly tell new soldiers about subjects that are unique to the unit. And considering the rapid turnover of personnel in most units, and the variety of assignments most infantry soldiers can expect over the years, this is an important advantage. Because this written record of instructions, procedures, and information can easily outlast all the personnel in the unit,

it is also the unit's best source of institutional memory.

Another advantage is that by providing a set of general instructions for most contingencies, a good SOP helps reduce the need for communicating instructions. This is especially important for units that routinely operate in widely dispersed formations and have to rely heavily on tactical radio communications.

## GETTING STARTED

How does a unit go about establishing an SOP that can do all these things? What should be included? And how should it be used once it is published?

Some units start simply by copying an SOP from a unit down the street and adapting it to its needs. A better idea is to look at the samples that can be found in Appendix G of ST 7-150, for example. These provide a good starting point and offer considerable information and proven ways of doing things in mechanized units. But they are not perfect. And they still must be tailored to a specific unit's needs. (These samples are also somewhat light in support operations, probably

because these vary greatly from one unit to another.)

All the members of a unit should participate in preparing an SOP; it belongs to the entire unit, not just to a platoon leader or the company commander who finally approves it. The green tabbers of the unit, who together have logged countless hours of experience, will all be affected by the SOP and should take an active part in writing it.

An SOP should include a detailed discussion of the duties and responsibilities of the different positions in the unit. These discussions not only help the new people coming in, they also enable each leader to assume the responsibilities of the next higher level when he needs to. In fact, an SOP can serve as a checklist for a newly promoted leader.

Information that is considered critical to a unit's operation and that might otherwise be overlooked or forgotten also should be included. Such critical procedures, instructions, and information can be indispensable to junior leaders in conducting hip-pocket training. If the SOP includes descriptions of both individual and collective tasks, for example, it can be used to guide individual and squad or

section training. Thus, in a fast-paced training environment, a readily accessible SOP can help make the best possible use of unexpectedly available training time.

The contents of an SOP are not limited to these subjects, of course. Each unit's mission is different, and different leaders may expect an SOP to cover different needs. But most important of all, the SOP should make sense and be realistic. It should not just pay lip service to anything.

Once the people in a unit have decided what their unit SOP should include, their next step is to put the information together. Different techniques apply here, but all of them require solid formatting, preparation, and distribution, and also consistent command emphasis.

The format of an SOP can be important in three ways: An SOP should be easy to carry, easy to keep clean in the field, and easy to change. One way of achieving these goals is to print copies in a size similar to that of a CEOI. Unlike a three-ring notebook, a booklet of such a size can be easily carried in a pocket. And the SOP can be made relatively fieldproof if it is covered with plastic or cardboard on the outside and secured with green tape. And so it will be easy to change, the SOP should carry each subject on a separate page or series of pages. In this way, the unit can revise a section without having to repackage the whole SOP.

The organization of subjects within an SOP might include a general section at the beginning, but the nuts and bolts of the SOP should be in separate

sections. These sections can be put in whatever order the author thinks is appropriate. One way is to group them into four categories:

- General — the normal organization and the location of key personnel.

- Tactical operations — alert operations, quartering party operations, assembly areas, road marches, fire distribution, and security (day and night).

- Support operations — daily track maintenance, breakdown procedures, sensitive item reports, and communications maintenance.

- Information — brevity codes; the duties of platoon leader, platoon sergeant, section leader, squad leader, and team leader; and unit navigational procedures.

Any annexes that are needed should be prepared in a succinct and straightforward manner, with a minimum of words being used to get the ideas across.

Once an SOP has been compiled and printed, its distribution largely determines whether it will be effective or not. If a platoon leader and his platoon sergeant, for example, are the only ones who have copies of the platoon SOP, the SOP will not meet the platoon's needs. Every soldier in the unit should have his own copy from the first day he comes into the unit.

Leaders of regularly attached units should also have copies. And when a unit goes to the field, extra copies should be taken along for other units that may be unexpectedly attached, or for other headquarters to which a platoon or the company may be cross-attached.

Even when everyone has a copy, something more is needed to make it work — command emphasis. Platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and squad leaders should operate and train using their SOP and should let it be known that they expect their subordinates to do the same. Then everyone will use it and profit by it. But if the soldiers see their leaders selectively ignoring certain subjects, they will also start picking areas to ignore. In short, for an SOP to be effective, all the soldiers must believe in it and follow it.

An SOP, to remain effective, also needs to be reviewed regularly. A good time for a unit to examine its SOP's effectiveness is when it returns from a long field problem. The leaders might ask themselves: Are all the annexes being adhered to? If not, why not? Is it because the unit is slack, or is it because a part of the SOP has become unrealistic? Has a better way been found to do something?

When an SOP has been carefully prepared and kept up to date, and when all the unit's members are familiar with it, can refer to it, and will follow it, it will be one of the leader's most valuable assets. It will then make a continuing contribution to the unit's efficiency, and it will outlast all of the unit's leaders.

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## A Forgotten War

CAPTAIN MICHAEL A. PHIPPS

Most American military professionals, when discussing 20th century warfare, talk about the Argonne, Nor-

mandy, the Ardennes, Pork Chop Hill, and Tet. But they rarely mention (in fact, may never have heard of)

Velikiye Luki, Kharkov, Nikopol, or Prokhorovka. This is understandable, perhaps, considering the fact that