

French CP Operations

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It happens on every exercise. The TOC has to move, and it is always at night. The guys on the day shift have not had a good chance to rest since they deployed. By the end of a two-week FTX, they are so tired and sleepy that they are a danger to themselves, to the rest of the unit, and to anyone else they may meet on the road during a move.

The night shift gets a lot of practice breaking down, moving, and setting up in the dark. The day shift gets a lot of practice trying to maintain personal control while their sleep loss accumulates.

Many an S-3 or executive officer (XO) has asked, "How can we fix this? If it's like this on a two-week training exercise, what's it going to be like when we have to do it for months—and with somebody trying to find us and kill us?" The French Army may have some of the answers we have been looking for.

In March 1988 I was a member of a 3d Armored Division liaison team to a French corps headquarters during a multi-national command post exercise. Our participation with the French was limited to five days, during which we were expected to man our liaison cell around the clock. The French corps chief of staff was politely insistent that we match our schedule to their shift operations. During this exercise I was introduced to a TOC shift procedure that I believe is far superior to any other I have been involved with.

The corps staff was divided into two cells. Each staff section had an equal manning of officers, sergeants, and junior enlisted soldiers in both cells.

Neither cell had a preponderance of the major decision makers, and not all of the principal staff officers were in the same cell. The corps chief of staff and the deputy chief of staff (a brigadier general and a colonel) served in different cells.

One interesting thing I noted was that some of the personnel on the staff, both officers and enlisted soldiers, were members of the French reserve force. I cannot remember their exact number or their duty positions, but it seemed they regularly participated in exercises with the headquarters.

THREE SHIFTS

Three shifts were scheduled in a 24-hour period: First shift, 0700-1400; second shift, 1400-2100; and third shift, 2100-0700. Over a 48-hour period, each cell would be on duty three times, once on each of these shifts. For example, the first cell would go on duty from 0700 until 1400 on Day 1, rest for seven hours, and go on the 10-hour night shift from 2100 until 0700 on Day 2. They would then rest for seven hours, go on the second shift from 1400-2100 of Day 2, and finally have an opportunity for a 10-hour rest period during the hours of darkness. Meals were served during a two-hour period at each shift change—from one hour before until one hour after.

Although each staff section was responsible for updating the members of the cell that was coming on duty, the entire relief cell was expected to be fully operational and ready to assume control

at the appointed hour. The replacement cell usually arrived to begin the transition about 30 minutes before the formal hand-over. I never saw any difficulties that could be charged to poor hand-over procedures. The French officers and sergeants formed a very professional group.

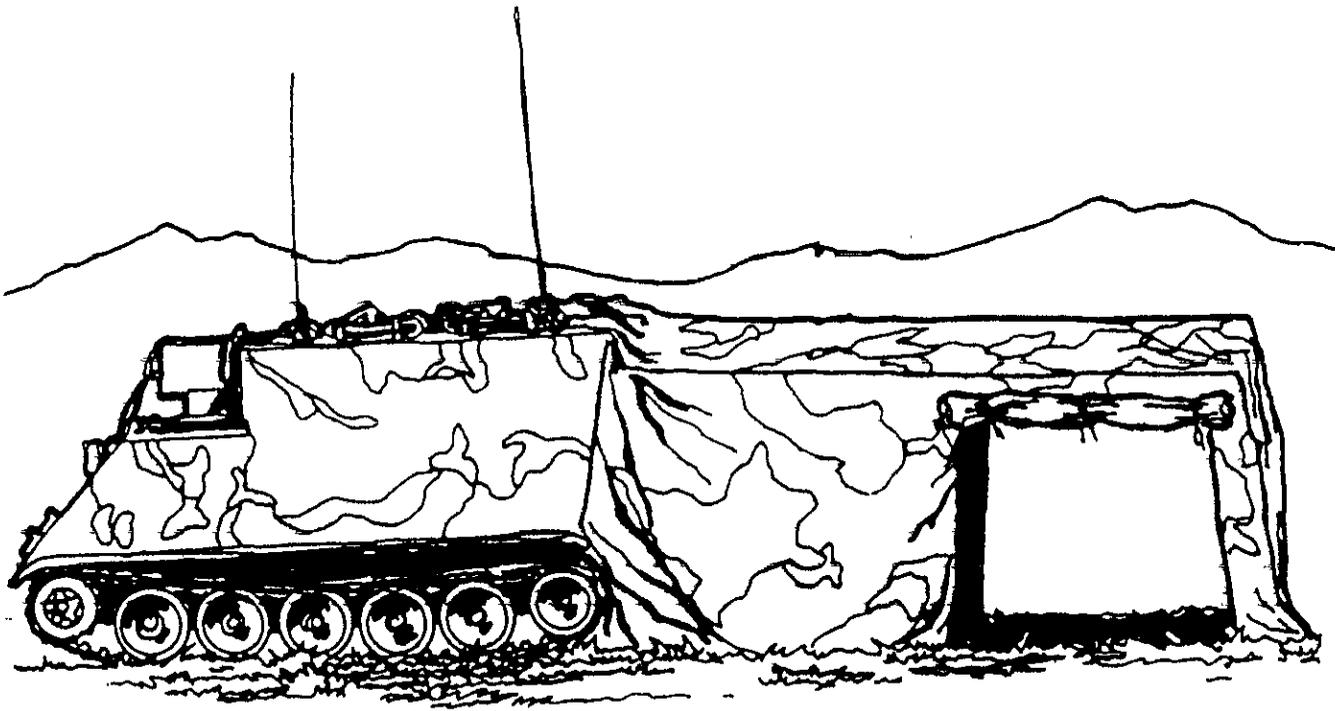
The only formal briefings took place daily, as I recall, at 1030. Either the deputy corps commander, the corps chief of staff, or the deputy chief of staff received the briefing and made the decisions for the day. If the situation dictated, there would also be a shorter briefing either late in the afternoon (about 1630) or in the evening (about 2000) to provide the guidance the staff needed to solve a particular problem. Only on two occasions do I recall that the corps commander was present at these briefings.

In retrospect, the formal briefing seemed to be held primarily to update the staff on the situation. We, of course, would update the senior G-3 officer before this briefing on the 3d Armored Division's current and future operations.

I must note that we remained in one location during the five days we were with the French. I cannot say with certainty they used echeloned command posts as we do, but if they had been required to move, I feel certain they could have done so easily while still maintaining control of the corps.

I observed some distinct advantages to the French way of running a command post.

- There were always decision makers in the CP.



- All members of the staff got an opportunity for at least eight hours of uninterrupted sleep in a 48-hour period, in addition to adequate time for personal hygiene.

- The shift procedures were highly disciplined and were respected by all staff members. Too, the soldiers' rest periods were carefully guarded.

In addition, this type of shift operation would support our own concept of continuous operations.

For us to adopt a similar system would require two actions. First, the people who resist change of any kind would have to ~~be forced to try it.~~ Second, our mess sections' possible objections to having such an un-American eating schedule would have to be dampened.

I am convinced that the French TOC schedule I worked with would be effective for a U.S. TOC group at brigade level or higher, perhaps even for the TOCs in some types of battalions. A divi-

sion level command post exercise would be a perfect time in which to test this concept. It is certainly worth trying.

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