

*“My next fight involved what may be the most notable issue surrounding the TACSOP today: doctrinal bloat — regurgitation of doctrinal information from field manuals so that the TACSOP will look all-inclusive when the OC asks to check it on the next NTC rotation.”*

# Building the “Perfect” TACSOP

by Captain Brant Guillory

Twice now I have been charged with building a Tactical Standard Operating Procedure (TACSOP) from scratch. The first instance was for my tank platoon in the Test & Experimentation Command, an unlikely place to use much of the same information my brethren used in the rest of the Army. The second was for 1-149 AR, CAARNG, when the battalion traded in its M60A3 tanks for M1IPs. As one of the few officers in the battalion with any experience with M1 tanks, the S3, Major Mark Malanka, selected me to ensure that our TACSOP was accurate with regards to the (relatively) new world of the Abrams tank.

## The Approach

Initially, I went straight to the Fort Knox supplemental reference for the tank platoon, figuring that I shouldn't need to reinvent the wheel. I also solicited input from the NCOs in the platoon based on their experience. Several of them were Gulf War veterans; together with a smart platoon sergeant, they provided enormous help with this task. In the end, we used little from the Fort Knox SOP, primarily because my NCOs had so much good information already on paper. But I kept it, and its company-level companion, should it ever become handy again down the line.

Developing an SOP for a platoon that does not often operate within a company/team was a challenge, but in TEXCOM, platoons often rolled to the field without other maneuver or support elements. Occasionally, only parts of the platoon deployed and the rest worked on another part of the test, often at another location. Consequently, our TACSOP was checklist-heavy. The intention was that any member of the platoon could pick up the book, and have the vehicles ready to operate, with all testing and tactical systems fully operational, without the platoon leader,

platoon sergeant, or even a tank commander, handy. It wasn't perfect, but it was sufficient.

In early 1999, while a member of the 1-149 AR staff, the battalion S3 gave me a second opportunity to develop a TACSOP. As in the first instance, I was one of the few officers who had experience on M1 tanks, but more important was my degree in writing and editing, my civilian job as a desktop publisher. Remembering the experience at Fort Hunter Liggett, I searched for every TACSOP I could find, to gain useful knowledge and borrow as much as possible. The S3 had provided a copy of the TACSOP of the Vanguard Brigade of the 24th Division. I went straight for the 1-149 AR TACSOP from the M60 era, and also rounded up the Fort Knox BN/TF TACSOP, and at least four others, both armor and infantry.

## Challenges – First, the Content

My next fight involved what may be the most notable issue surrounding the TACSOP today: doctrinal bloat — regurgitation of doctrinal information from field manuals so that the TACSOP will look all-inclusive when the OC asks to check it on the next NTC rotation. A BN/TF TACSOP does not need a sketch of a tank platoon column. Hell, a tank platoon TACSOP doesn't need it! We have an army-wide “TACSOP” for tank platoon movement formations. It's called *FM 17-15, Tank Platoon*, and since everyone in the army is supposed to use the same FMs, there is no need to put it in a book that is supposed to be specific to your battalion/task force.

What is important is to translate doctrinal information into a relevant tool for soldiers to use. For example, specific Troop Leading Procedures were outlined and described through each step as it related to the 1-149 AR: “Conduct Recon” involves *these* specific people conducting *these* minimum

tasks, and *these* additional ones, if time and resources permit — the assistant S2 did the map recon for mobility issues while the S2 would check out the enemy situation, either by templating or by visual recon; the S3 Air was in charge of terrain management, freeing the S3 to go forward to look at the battlefield.

Another challenge was that many TACSOPs attempt to deal with every permutation of a situation, instead of establishing one procedure — a standard procedure — and dealing with case-by-case issues as they arise. “Employing ACE/Dozer” specifically addressed who within the 1-149 AR was responsible for moving engineer assets around the battlefield in the defense. The Vanguard Brigade TACSOP, for example, had left four options for “CINC Dozer”: BN CSM, BN Master Gunner, Engineer Platoon Leader, or BN Liaison Officer, and left no provisions for determining which order those were to be used. The 1-149 AR TACSOP specified that CINC Dozer was the BN CSM, and if he was unavailable, the BN MG filled in. Beyond that, your TACSOP addresses specific scenarios that should be handled on a case-by-case basis. In a TACSOP, a unit cannot account for every instance when both the CSM and MG are out of the loop.

## Organizing the Document

Most TACSOPs I read were simply confusing. In the Fort Knox sample, too many “cards” hiding in the wrong places only enhanced confusion. Organization by Battlefield Operation Systems (BOS) seemed logical. The “Organization for Combat” and “Cross-attachment Procedures” are under Command and Control. “Tactical Road Marches” are under the Maneuver heading, while “UMCP Operations” are in the CSS section. Added to the seven BOSs was a chapter for “Standards”

**Figure 1  
TF 1-149 AR  
TEAL Report**

Only those lines which have changed since last report are submitted by radio. Written TEAL report is due every night at Commanders' meeting.

- a. Current Slant report (Tanks/IFVs/other PCs)
- b. Current location (reference friendly graphics)
- c. Current Ammo/Fuel status (Green/Amber/Red/Black)
- d. Enemy activity (either "none" or SALT format)
- e. Sensitive items report (either "all accounted for" based on last Green 2 or "lost X items, Green 2 to follow)
- f. MOPP Level (if changed)
- g. Personnel present (include attachments, do not include detachments)

CO/TM & Callsign	SLANT	CDR's ASSMT	LOCATION	CSS STATUS <small>Green = 90-100% Amber = 70-90% Red = 50-70% Black = 0-50%</small>	TANKS	ITV/TOW	IFV/APC	INF SQDs	CSS TRACKS	GREEN TWO	MOPP STATUS	PERS	
	<b>A</b>	Green Amber Red Black	<b>B</b>	Green Amber Red Black	<b>C</b>	AUTH PRES MAINT	AUTH PRES MAINT	AUTH PRES MAINT	TRK		<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>

Because 1-149 AR's sister infantry battalion, 1-159 IN, is still equipped with M113-series vehicles, the TOC tracks ITV/TOW systems separately from standard troop-carrier M113s. CSS tracks, because they are not primary fighting systems, are a separate tracking item. However, when the CO/TM slant is reported, it comes in as "TANKS/TOWs/PCs/INF SQDs."

**Figure 2  
TF 1-149 AR  
ORANGE Report &  
CSS Chart extract**

Notice that the first five items on both charts are identical, which helps multiple command posts track information that is vital to all players on the battlefield.

- a. Number of personnel authorized (Officers/Warrants/Enlisted)
- b. Number of per present for duty (Officers/Warrants/Enlisted)
- c. Number of vehicles authorized by type
- d. Number of vehicles present by type
- e. Number of vehicles in maintenance and estimated time of availability
- f. Ammo needed by type
- g. Fuel needed by type
- h. Rations needed by type
- i. Class IV needed by type

CO/TM & Callsign	SLANT	CDR's ASSMT	LOCATION	CSS STATUS <small>Green = 90-100% Amber = 70-90% Red = 50-70% Black = 0-50%</small>	Class I	Class III	Class V <small>SMALL ARMS</small>	Class V <small>TANK</small>	Class V <small>OTHER</small>	MAINT STATUS	MOPP STATUS	PERS
		Green Amber Red Black		Green Amber Red Black	A		5.36	SABOT	TOW			O
					B		7.62	HEAT	25mm			W
					C		50Cal	OTHER	Stinger			E

The ORANGE report does not replicate the CSS chart as closely as the TEAL replicates Tactical chart, because ORANGE reports are often sent out of contact when the RTOs in the CTCP have time to transpose information. ORANGE reports are required throughout the TACSOP: within 30 minute of establishing an assembly area, at any ROM or hasty LOGPAC, and at any XO's meeting. Only those lines which have changed are submitted; consequently, lines A and C are not often used, and lines F-I are only used during hot situations.

battle by providing the commander with a specific set of limited information as it actually happens.

The battalion now had a TACSOP and a set of TOC charts. Both had been through review by the staff sections and company commanders. It was time for trial by fire. Of course, National Guard units don't often get a rotation to the NTC, so we had to settle for the next best thing, a Janus exercise scheduled for the next month.

### Trial by Fire

The mission for the Janus simulation was simple — BN/TF defense on the Yakima Training Center terrain. Everyone had their report formats, their TOC charts, their TACSOPs well in hand. The plan had been prepared; it was time to fight. The battle unfolded as expected when a regiment of T-80s and BMP-3s faced down a battalion whose battlefield calculus was predicated on T-72s and BMP-2s. It got ugly fast.

**Editor's Note:** The Tactical SITREPS and CSS Tracking Charts were too large to reproduce here, but they will be available, along with the TEAL and ORANGE Reports, under the "Back Issues" for May-June 2001 on our website: [www.knox.army.mil/armormag/](http://www.knox.army.mil/armormag/)

However, the blessing of that mismatch was that we got a lot of work out of our TEAL and ORANGE reports, as well as finding lots of little things wrong in the TACSOP. For example, we had the wrong basic loads on the ammo trucks; the TACSOP failed to account for differences between offensive and defensive missions and class V pre-stocks in a mobile defense. The document had no provision for bringing up a "fifth flag" to act as a company HQ and control multiple platoons, so the scout platoon leader found himself with the mortars and a tank platoon under his control. Our TACSOP still needed work, but the one piece we were most unsure of — the TEAL and ORANGE reports — had worked out well for us, allowing every command post to maintain nearly identical battle tracking, with over 90 percent real-time accuracy, information vital to the commander for making decisions under the pressure of combat.

which dealt with field uniforms, packing lists, and equipment standards, as well as PCIs. A final chapter addressed reports.

### Tie it all together

Having resolved the issue of what to include in the TACSOP, and how to organize it, the next step was to work on reporting. The operations sergeant major, SGM Ernesto Perez, and I were already in the midst of remaking our TOC charts. We intentionally designed both the charts and reports to dovetail. We developed a special report, known as the TEAL Report, that was mixture of "Blue" (operations) and "Green" (intel) reports. The tactical SITREP

chart for our TOC followed this report exactly (see Figure 1). As the companies called in their TEAL reports, the RTO simply wrote directly across each company's line: slant, location, CSS status, MOPP level, sensitive items, and enemy contact. Anyone receiving a report from a company could fill in the information directly across the status board. A similar report/chart combination for the CSS side mixed Red and Yellow reports to form the ORANGE report (see Figure 2). We still used our red, yellow, blue, and green reports as required and scheduled, especially when forwarding information to the brigade. Our two new reports were designed to minimize air-time during the

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We had found a way to eliminate the lag between company reports coming into the TOC, the map getting updated, and the charts reflecting the tactical and CSS situations. And we were still able to extrapolate the relevant information from our TEAL and ORANGE reports to submit our appropriate red, yellow, blue, and green reports to the brigade.

### Using Our New TACSOP

After scrubbing the TACSOP, we used it at Yakima Training Center that summer. We were encouraged when our AC/RC advisors asked for a copy of it and their eyes got big, as they were able to flip through it easily and naturally, and find almost everything they were looking for. The points they suggested, such as an improved casualty evacuation procedure, were incorporated into subsequent editions of the TACSOP.

The single best idea to emerge from the TACSOP development was the brainchild of then-CPT Bill Beane, our S3 Air. CPT Beane offered numerous tidbits of advice from his active-duty days with the 11th ACR on the inter-German border and his days with the 4th ID at Fort Carson. Every night, the battalion held a command and staff brief at the TOC, where all the staff sections, commanders, and other leaders (UMCP, scout platoon, battalion surgeon, etc.) would gather to report on that day's events and the plans for the next day. At the opening of every meeting, CPT Beane would hand out a sheet of paper to everyone in the tent and ask four questions, directly out of the TACSOP. The intention was two-fold: (1) to force the leaders of the battalion to crack the book and examine those same things they were asking their soldiers to know by heart, and (2) to bring to light controversial or questionable issues so that they could be discussed with all the principals present. A few examples of what we found:

- The CSS slice accompanying a cross-attached company was too small.
- Nowhere did the TACSOP specify who controlled the movement of the mortars during the battle and who told them when to displace and bound.
- The battalion TACSOP gave specific guidance to each company for the composition of its quartering party within the framework of the battalion quartering party, instead of simply say-

ing "Minimum 1 track/squad per company" and allowing each company to specify who their quartering party would be.

- There was no specified medic support for the TOC or UMCP.

If you really want to make your TACSOP hum in this era of combined-arms operations, have an infantryman go through it. We updated our quartering party and assembly area procedures based on the advice of a career 11B/11M so that when the 1-149 AR gets that cross-attached infantry company, the TACSOP is ready for them.

Our TACSOP still wasn't perfect, but it was improving, and more importantly, *everyone* was helping make it better.

After Yakima, I gathered up all of the notes I compiled and started on my revisions. Since the 1-149 AR was so close to Silicon Valley, I had jokingly dubbed the Janus copy of the TACSOP the "beta" version, and after Yakima, I distributed "TACSOP 2.0" to the battalion, along with a complete set of all documents, report formats, and charts, all on disk so subsequent revisions would be easier. I left the 1-149 AR for South Carolina when my civilian job pulled me away, but I left knowing that we, as a battalion, had created a useful living document that people actually referred to instead of stashing it in their rucks in case an OC asks to see a copy of it.

### Lessons Learned

If you really want to learn how a battalion task force is supposed to operate in combat, don't simply read the TACSOP, endeavor to write one. The most important lesson you learn is that the TACSOP changes — constantly. The real challenge is putting those changes in the hands of someone knowledgeable to update them throughout the unit. An officer or senior NCO who has been in the battalion long enough to see it maneuver and understand how it operates is essential for TACSOP development and updating.

The problems found while creating or revising TACSOPs are simple to describe, but difficult to rectify.

- The most serious issue is the inclusion of doctrinal information that is standard across the Army. A simple rule of thumb: if it's in a manual some-

where, it shouldn't be in the TACSOP, unless it identifies specific equipment and/or people to do those tasks (see the above example of the TLPs).

- Organize the TACSOP logically. Whatever method you employ should be universal and all-inclusive. The BOS method is not perfect — I still don't know where to put traffic control roadblocks that involve engineer assets creating tank scrapes — but it was better than the annoying "card" method used by Fort Knox that jumps around from point to point during the battle.

- Incorporate your battle tracking mechanisms. It is vital that the commander and his staff have accurate, timely information on the fight. How many of the battalion's standard reports correlate directly to the battle tracking charts used in the TOC? Can the RTO fill out the chart without an interpreter to show him where all the information goes? If not, then either the charts or the reports need to be redone.

- The last issue, training, is both vital and the easiest to rectify. Every officer and senior NCO in the battalion should be familiar with the TACSOP contents and should be validated to use the document by some form of test. CPT Beane one night jokingly asked as one of his questions, "What's the third item in the right column of the 'A' bag packing list?" Everyone chuckled, but when we all went to look it up, we found the MOPP suit in a duffel bag in the company 2½-ton truck instead of with the soldier in his ruck. That was quickly fixed.

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*CPT Guillory would like to thank MAJ Russell Dewell and COL Ken Guillory for their help in developing this article.*