# The Command Post SOP: A Blueprint for Success

*By Captain Eric R. Price and Captain Jay A. Hedstrom*

*Six months have passed since you left the Advanced Course and were assigned as an assistant S3 in a divisional combat engineer battalion. In that time you have helped develop the battalion's training plan, which culminates with the battalion's first National Training Center rotation in two years. Today, as you update the battalion commander, many thoughts race through your mind. The battalion changes command in just two weeks; three key staff captains recently took command, leaving lieutenants to pick up the pieces; the battalion operations NCO just arrived last month; and enlisted personnel turbulence within the Headquarters Company is high. Your chest tightens as you realize for the first time that only two staff exercises remain before the rotation. The battalion commander reminds you that since the new S3 just arrived, you are the senior, most experienced man on the battalion's battle staff. Heading back to the office, you war-game ways to pull the staff together in the short time left to prepare.*

---

In today's Army of rapidly changing missions and high personnel turbulence, integration and quick training of new personnel are prerequisites for success. Engineer battalions work hard to develop, refine, and execute simple battle drills at squad and crew levels. Limited training resources have resulted in focused platoon battle tasks and company mission essential task lists. However, many units spend little time organizing command post operations, or when they do, they fail to commit the results to paper. At best, this causes them to reinvent the wheel—rather than building and refining an existing product—every time a new commander, executive officer, or S3 assumes his duties. Worst case, units must re-establish procedures every time their command post deploys. In either case, the command post staff spends too much time managing internal operations rather than focusing on timely and effective command and control of combat operations. Units arriving at the National Training Center often are ill-prepared to execute the key staff battle task of operating the battalion tactical operations center (TOC). Battalions with a well-established Command Post Standing Operating Procedure (CPSOP) for their main, rear, tactical, and administrative command posts are better able to cope with the rapidly changing conditions of the battlefield and tend to conduct more successful combat operations.

This article describes a method the combat engineer battalion's battle staff can use to develop and implement a basic CPSOP. The method is applicable to all battalion command posts. It focuses on establishing the CPSOP around six basic TOC functions; identifying the key supporting tasks and related tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) for each of these functions; and organizing and implementing those TTPs.

## CPSOP Development

There are several ways to arrive at a workable CPSOP. Each member of the battle staff should first turn to doctrinal manuals, because it is important not only to understand his own duties and responsibilities but also those of other personnel. Many manuals include an overview of TOC operations, but few provide detailed guidance on establishing and implementing a workable SOP. Our CPSOP development begins with the six basic TOC functions identified in the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) newsletter, *Tactical Operations Center* (May 1995).

- ❒ Receive information.
- ❒ Distribute information.
- ❒ Analyze information.
- ❒ Make recommendations.
- ❒ Integrate resources.
- ❒ Synchronize resources.

This CALL newsletter clearly explains how to assess current command post operations and develop a training plan for improvement. The six TOC functions are not listed in any Army field manual, but they fit the axiom "form follows function." In other words, decide up front what functions the TOC must perform to be successful. Then identify the methodology to best accomplish each function with available resources.

Despite calling them six "TOC" functions, they apply to the main, tactical, and rear command posts. Throughout this article, references to the TOC pertain to all combat engineer battalion command posts. To ensure that all essential tasks and supporting TTPs are addressed and fully integrated in the final product, all staff sections and other command post personnel must be involved in the development process. Begin by gathering personnel from each battalion command post to discuss these functions. Work together to determine essential tasks that support each function. Because each

function depends on the others, some tasks don't fit well under any particular one. List those tasks separately, as they will be addressed further when CPSOP organization begins.

Tasks in the CALL Newsletter provide an excellent starting point for developing a list of tasks that support each TOC function. Identify additional tasks based on the unit's specific experience and mission. Detailed descriptions of the functions and supporting tasks identified in CALL's *Tactical Operations Center* follow:

**Receive Information.** Receive information through standardized reports and orders from subordinate, higher, and adjacent units. Supporting tasks include:

- ❒ Receive messages, reports, and orders.
- ❒ Monitor the tactical situation and track the battle.
- ❒ Monitor the location and activities of friendly units.
- ❒ Update TOC charts and heads-up displays.
- ❒ Update maps and overlays.
- ❒ Maintain a TOC journal.

**Distribute Information.** Control information distribution within the TOC; report information to subordinate, higher, and adjacent units.

- ❒ Submit reports.
- ❒ Control message traffic flow.
- ❒ Conduct retransmission operations.
- ❒ Conduct relay operations.
- ❒ Publish and distribute orders.
- ❒ Conduct shift change, command, and information briefings.

**Analyze Information.** Consolidate reports and conduct battle staff analysis as part of the Tactical Decision-Making Process (TDMP).

- ❒ Consolidate reports.
- ❒ Conduct predictive analysis using collected data.
- ❒ Develop a time line.
- ❒ Conduct the TDMP and orders drill.

**Make Recommendations.** Submit recommendations to the commander based on the analysis of information collected.

**Integrate Resources.** Coordinate integration of the unit's activities with those of subordinate, higher, and adjacent units.

- ❒ Conduct assistant brigade engineer and tactical operations.
- ❒ Produce annexes for the higher headquarters order.
- ❒ Receive and integrate engineer and combined arms attachments.

**Synchronize Resources.** Synchronize the unit's activities with those of subordinate, higher, and adjacent units.

- ❒ Conduct liaison operations.
- ❒ Coordinate with other units.

The following tasks relate to the overall operation of the command post and support all six basic TOC functions:

- ❒ Identify the task or purpose of each command post.
- ❒ Set up and dismantle the command post.
- ❒ Establish mission-dependent command post configurations.
- ❒ Establish guard, sleep, and shift manning plans.
- ❒ Monitor radios.
- ❒ Provide life support for TOC personnel.

After identifying essential supporting tasks, outline the TTPs used to execute each task based on doctrine and the unit's way of doing business. If the unit has no established method for executing an identified supporting task, brainstorm a method and commit it to paper. Since this is a working document, it's okay to try new things. However, the TTPs you develop should not conflict with other established SOPs for your unit or with those of your supported maneuver unit. Once TTPs for each supporting task have been identified, organize the tasks into a logical sequence to develop the layout of the CPSOP.

## CPSOP Organization

The six basic TOC functions provide a means of identifying supporting tasks, but because the functions are interrelated, it is difficult to use them to organize supporting tasks in a final SOP. Instead, look at the tasks using the five "Ws"—*who, what, when, where, why*—and *how*. Sections of the CPSOP can then be designed around answering one or two of these questions. Organize each section by addressing the TTPs that support each task as it relates to all of the unit's command posts. Use subparagraphs or subsections as necessary to provide detailed information regarding TTPs that pertain only to one command post. The figure on page 48 shows a sample format.

Another method of organizing the CPSOP is to first list the main, tactical, and rear command posts and then discuss the manning, layout, and operation of each. However, this approach can lead to redundancy and a sense of compartmentalization. Addressing tasks in the CPSOP by the five "Ws" focuses on the fundamentals of command post operations before differences between each type are described. This method eases the transition of personnel from one command post to another within the unit, as often happens when units "surge" personnel to the main command post just before a battle.

## CPSOP Implementation

The last stage in the process is to train and implement the CPSOP, thus turning written products into true TTPs for the entire battalion battle staff. While many approaches will achieve the desired results, CALL's *Tactical*

## Sample CPSOP Format

### Table of Contents

**I. Command Post Overview *(Why)*** - a brief description of the how and why of each command post.

- ❒ Mission of each command post within the unit (tactical, main, rear, combat trains, etc.).
- ❒ Task or purpose of each command post.
- ❒ Battlefield laydown and locations of command posts.

**II. Duties and Responsibilities *(Who, What)*** - a definition of the specific role each person plays in command post operations in terms of mission requirements.

- ❒ Manning and shift makeup and schedule.
- ❒ Life support for command post personnel.
- ❒ Roles and responsibilities of all command post personnel (battalion commander, executive officer, command sergeant major, primary staff and staff NCOs, support staff and staff NCOs, assistant brigade engineer, battle captains and battle NCOs, liaison officers, radio-telephone operators, drivers, etc.)

**III. Command Post Layout *(Where)*** - a detailed description of the command post's physical properties.

- ❒ Physical layout of command post vehicles, extensions, briefing tents, sleep tents, and antennas.
- ❒ Locations of maps, heads-up displays, equipment, equipment storage, supply storage, and personnel.
- ❒ Alternate command post configurations.
- ❒ Integration with supported unit command post.
- ❒ Security plan.
- ❒ Communications or other links with adjacent command posts.
- ❒ Required items such as maps, overlays, charts, orders books, manuals, and supplies.

**IV. Command Post Operations *(When, How)*** - a clear description of routine actions during the planning, preparation, and execution phases of combat operations. Lay out this section using the six basic TOC functions as an outline. It should address:

- ❒ Information management.
- ❒ TOC chart and heads-up displays.
- ❒ Battle-tracking procedures.
- ❒ Maintaining the command post journal.
- ❒ Briefing formats.
- ❒ Standard unit time lines.
- ❒ TDMP procedures.
- ❒ Reporting procedures.
- ❒ Shift-change procedures.
- ❒ Displacement procedures.
- ❒ Integration procedures.
- ❒ Retransmit and relay operations.

**V. Standardized Charts/Heads-Up Displays *(How)*** - examples of each tracking or information chart to be posted in the command post. These should be standardized across all command posts within the unit.

*Operations Center* newsletter suggests the following:

**Conduct CPSOP Classes.** Conduct classroom training for all command post personnel on tasks such as the TOC journal, battle tracking, reporting and TDMP procedures, displacement, and setup/teardown. Classes will familiarize personnel with procedures outlined in the new CPSOP.

**Make the CPSOP Part of Garrison Operations.** Take tasks from the CPSOP that mirror tasks currently performed in garrison and make them part of the daily routine. For example, train battle-tracking skills by maintaining a status board of the battalion's companies in the S3 shop using the command post heads-up displays. In addition, have radio-telephone operators answer phones, maintain a staff journal, and pass on messages using the same forms as those used in the command post. Train subordinate units to submit reports in garrison using the report formats in the tactical SOP.

**Set Up the Command Post Every Month.** Exercise load plans, storage plans, and multiple command post configurations. Coordinate for all the battalion command posts to set up and conduct communications exercises and TOC exercises simultaneously and regularly.

**Integrate Command Post Operations Into Routine Unit Training.** Don't set up command posts only during field training exercises or command post exercises. Use routine training events such as firing ranges and land navigation courses as training opportunities for the command post. Set up battalion command posts to support company training events so that both company and battalion command post personnel receive training.

**Revise and Improve the CPSOP.** Use the above training methods to validate the CPSOP. Reassess the TTPs and update them as necessary. The CPSOP must be a "living" document to meet the changing needs of an organization.

## Conclusion

Observations at the National Training Center indicate a direct correlation between the ability of units to conduct synchronized and efficient command post operations and their level of success in executing combat missions. Unit tracking charts may not make the breach go in, but accurate information gives the commander and staff opportunities to take advantage of situations as they develop. A battalion battle staff can identify command post functions and essential tasks that support each function, commit those tasks to paper, and train them like a battle drill. Then they can use training opportunities like those provided at the National Training Center to train personnel in the art—rather than the mechanics—of command and control.

*Captain Price, the engineer battalion logistical trainer, has been an observer/controller at the NTC since 1997.*

*Captain Hedstrom, the engineer battalion TOC trainer, has been an observer/controller at the NTC since 1996.*