



*NCOs take on added responsibilities in a tactical operations center.*

*Operations Sergeant...*

## Train Your NCOs For the TOC

By SGM Jerry Puik

**Y**our entire career as a hard-charging motivated noncommissioned officer has been spent in challenging leadership positions such as squad leader, section sergeant, platoon sergeant and first sergeant. And that was just fine because you've always enjoyed being "on the ground" working with soldiers. But now that hard-driving work ethic has landed you a job as an operations sergeant. The only staff experience you ever had was as a PFC many, many years ago when you were tasked (with much resistance) to be the driver for the battalion S-3.

You remember vividly how the tactical operations center (TOC) was a place run primarily by officers. The enlisted soldiers only performed tasks such as ensuring the coffee maker was always up and running, pitching tents and pulling guard duty.

Well, those days have passed. In today's smaller Army, the NCO is much more involved in the staff planning and

coordination of combat operations within the TOC.

Since you are truly a professional NCO of the highest caliber, you undoubtedly want to do the best job you can, so now it's time for you, the operations sergeant, to ask a few questions and assess your section. You already know your NCOs have become subject matter experts in the myriad of duties required while operating in garrison such as training NCO, schools NCO, filling out unit status reports and hundreds of other duties. But are the NCOs and soldiers in your section trained to perform their most critical function, their assigned duties within the TOC, when your unit deploys to combat? Does your unit have a current tactical operations center standard operating procedure (TOC-SOP)? Do officers or battle staff NCOs post and update the map boards? Do the battle staff NCOs and radio operators know what the commander's critical information requirements (CCIR) are? Do they even know the meaning of the acronym? Do the battle staff NCOs un-

derstand the tactical decision-making process (TDMP)? These are all questions to ask when assessing your section.

Here are a few other things to think about when considering what training your section needs in order to improve TOC operations. First, read all the after action reports and take-home packages prepared on your TOC during the past two years. This includes any trips your unit has made to the National Training Center at Ft. Irwin, CA, or the Joint Readiness Training Center at Ft. Polk, LA, and any recent participation in WARFIGHTER command post exercises. These products provide great insight to potential training weaknesses.

Next, pull out a copy of the TOCSOP. Does it cover the duties and responsibilities of battle staff NCOs? Most TOC-SOPs do a great job of describing duties of key officers, but don't go into enough detail listing the duties and responsibilities of the operations sergeant/sergeant major, assistant operations sergeants or shift NCOs, as well as radio operators. A newly-assigned battle staff NCO or radio operator should be able to pick up the TOCSOP, read it and understand what his or her responsibilities are within that TOC. This will help lessen the time required to train that person to perform assigned duties.

Other areas that might require some training are staff journals and journal files. In most TOCs, it's the responsibility of a battle staff NCO to prepare and maintain these documents. Normally, each staff section within a TOC maintains its own staff journal and journal files. How to prepare staff journals and journal files is covered in some detail in AR 220-15; FM 101-5, Appendix B (dated May 84) and (if you're fortunate enough to have a copy) the final draft of FM 101-5, dated Aug 93, Appendix I. The staff journal is normally recorded on DA Form 1594 (Daily Staff Journal or Duty Officer's Log) and covers a period not to exceed 24 hours. Common errors include not filling out the heading completely, running the journal for an extended period of time (i.e., longer than 24 hours), incomplete entries and not indicating accurately what action was tak-

en in the "Action Taken" column. Typically, you'll find the word "Logged" under the "Action Taken" column for all entries in that journal. FM 101-5 suggests using letter symbols to represent certain actions taken and explaining the letter symbols in a legend.

If officers within the TOC are posting and updating map boards, they will not have sufficient time to do their own job of integrating resources and synchronizing the fight. This can lead to tired and inefficient officers, resulting in an ineffective staff. Battle staff NCOs must be thoroughly knowledgeable on how to depict operational graphics and symbols in accordance with FM 101-5-1 and FM 21-26. Some frequently overlooked items include map overlays that do not have the proper classification clearly labeled on the top and bottom and no registration marks to aid in lining up the overlay to the map. Marginal information should also be included on the overlay. If your commander requires you to use colors and symbols that are not LAW FM 101-5-1, they must be explained in the overlay's legend.

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Does your TOCSOP cover the actions taken during a shift change? Are the battle staff NCOs involved in the shift change brief or is it exclusively the officers' domain? Whether there is involvement of battle staff NCOs at the shift change brief or not, there still must be a one-on-one exchange between the battle staff NCOs going off shift and those coming on shift, to include the radio operators. A good technique is to prepare, on a pocket-size card, a generic shift change briefing format for all battle staff NCOs and radio operators to carry in their breast pocket. When it's time for a shift change they each pull out the card

and go down the list and follow the format. This ensures that a thorough briefing has taken place and the incoming personnel have a complete picture of what occurred during the last shift.

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Another area where battle staff NCOs have significant impact is information management. If you do not have an effective means for displaying information and distributing information, your TOC will likely become bogged down and cease to function effectively during fast-paced operations. Most TOCSOPs cover in detail the types of charts and status boards that will be displayed in the TOC according to your commander's preference. Where the shortcoming is observed is in the area of maintaining and updating the information, especially during fast-paced operations. Your TOCSOP should specify who is responsible for maintaining these charts and at what frequency they are to be updated. Additionally, these visual display techniques should each have a date-time group clearly posted, to ensure your commander gets the most current information available. It also allows you, the operations sergeant, to spot-check to ensure everyone is doing a good job.

There is no single doctrinal source that covers in detail tactics, techniques and procedures for TOC operations, but the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) at Ft. Leavenworth, KS, has published an excellent newsletter titled **Tactical Operations Center (TOC), Number 95-7, dated May 95**. This particular issue covers many of the problems experienced by TOCs at the combined training centers (CTC). Some of

the areas covered in the newsletter include TOC functions, duties and responsibilities of TOC personnel, TOC layout and information management. It also includes a simple generic, command post exercise (CPX) you can conduct in your unit and ideas on easy-to-implement home-station training for your TOC personnel. This particular issue should be on the mandatory reading list of all operations sergeants. It can be ordered from CALL Customer Service at Ft. Leavenworth by calling DSN 552-2255 or commercial (913) 684-2255. The E-mail address is [call@leav-emh.army.mil](mailto:call@leav-emh.army.mil). If you enjoy "surfing the 'Net" you might want to browse the CALL homepage at <http://call.army.mil:1100/call.html> or browse their web page at <http://call.army.mil:1100/call/homepage/newsletters/95-7/toctoc.html> and read online the entire contents of **Newsletter 95-7, Tactical Operations Center (TOC)**.

One final point: The training tips discussed in this article apply equally whether you're in a combat, combat support or combat service support unit from battalion level all the way up to corps level, or a member of the fire support element, air defense section, or the engineer section within a larger unit's TOC. The important thing to remember is to

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train at every possible opportunity. The battle staff NCOs and soldiers within your section can contribute immensely to the success of your unit's mission, but you must train them so they can competently and confidently carry out their duties within the TOC. ■

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