

Continual Assessment and Revision of SOPs

By First Lieutenant Michael P. Carvelli

Current deployments to Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom are forcing light, air-borne, and mechanized units to operate as if they were motorized. The prevalence of high-mobility multi-purpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs) and the new mine-resistant, ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicles have been the main facilitator of this change.

Platoon- and company-level leaders are the primary personnel responsible for recognizing and adapting to the continual changes occurring on the battlefield. Company commanders, platoon leaders, and platoon sergeants should be the driving force of continual assessment, rehearsal, training/ execution, and refinement of standing operating procedures (SOPs). Input from Soldiers filling all positions within a unit should be included as part of the continual assessment process. A patrol leader cannot fill all roles and relies on the information provided by gunners, drivers, dismounts, and others to improve all the areas included in the SOP.

After a deployment, the following areas of the SOP and unit training have undergone constant revision:

- Operations
- Maintenance/recovery
- Communications
- Medical needs
- Interpreters

Operations

Mission Briefs. Also known as “convoy briefs” or “patrol briefs,” mission briefs should always be modeled after the five-paragraph operations order format. Signal plans, frequencies, priorities of medical support, and locations of key leaders typically do not change. Continual reviews of the SOPs are verbal precombat checks that the patrol leader gives during the brief. Add or delete what is relevant and applicable each time a mission brief is given.

Clearing Techniques. Integrate all host nation security forces to improve security and provide the direct link with locals. Always adjust to enemy tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP). Consider the enemy’s tactics, as they are always evolving, and adjust unit TTP accordingly.

Load Plans. These should be detailed enough to cover all mission-essential equipment, but not be so micromanaged that they detract from operator preference. Dictate where medical equipment, sensitive items, ammunition, and maintenance

parts belong in each type of vehicle to ensure that Soldiers can quickly move to a vehicle and resupply as needed.

Maintenance/Recovery

Linkup. Develop SOPs and linkup procedures to integrate recovery assets or other units that assist with recovery. Define the roles of each element/leader—security, recovery, liaison—before the operation is conducted.

Equipment. Redundancy of recovery equipment such as tow straps, sling legs, and tow bars within the patrol are very necessary. For example, tow straps tend to break after just a single use. With the increase in weight and protection of vehicles, it is necessary to adapt recovery and operating equipment to achieve effective results in-sector. Spare recovery equipment is a must for all units.

Training. Practice recovery techniques across all vehicles within a patrol. Understanding the capabilities of recovery equipment can give leaders an increased ability to call for dedicated recovery assets while on a mission. This increases the unit’s self-recovery ability and reduces the time that a unit is exposed with broken equipment.

Communications

Succession of Signal. Model communications after the primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency plan. Just like the succession of command, this gives each leader an immediate list when systems become unusable or unreliable.

Alternate Means. Each type of communication offers distinct advantages and disadvantages to the user. Leaders may be exposed to situations when one type of communication is ineffective and will need to immediately transfer to another type. Continual training and communication exercises are beneficial to units at all levels.

Medical Needs

Training. Preparing Soldiers for the need to provide lifesaving medical assistance will boost their confidence and improve their competence.

- *Monthly scenario-based training.* Complacency becomes more prevalent the longer a unit is deployed, and leaders must continue training to fight it. Keeping training both realistic and difficult ensures that each Soldier is prepared throughout the deployment.

- *Intravenous (IV) stick practice.* Practice giving IV injections under red light, while using night vision goggles, and while both patient and responder are wearing complete personal protective equipment. This will increase the lifesaving abilities of the Soldiers and give them confidence when injuries actually occur.
- *Limited visibility practice.* Perform all medical tasks under conditions of good and limited visibility to increase competence.

Combat Lifesavers (CLS). All personnel should be CLS-qualified. This is enforced very well within company-level units, but CLS certification should not end once the deployment begins. Plan and resource monthly or quarterly refreshers.

Standardization. The setup and location of all medical equipment should be standardized across a patrol. This includes the standardization of all individual first aid kits and CLS bags. The ability to quickly identify the location of medical equipment ensures effective and timely treatment.

Interpreters

M*edical.* Ensure that interpreters are CLS-qualified. Since interpreters are a combat multiplier, basic medical training will be extremely useful when needed.

Alternate Roles. Define the interpreter's role for each battle drill. For each drill, provide a task and purpose, such as "respond to a vehicle rollover" or "react to contact." The interpreter should have a designated place and activity that assists the unit with accountability during combat.

Quick Brief. Speak with the interpreter shortly before attending a meeting or speaking to a group of people to ensure that the interpreter understands your message clearly. This will clarify most of the speech. Also, the interpreter represents the speaker and should understand that voice inflection and emphasis are required across the language boundary.

Summary

Continual after-action reviews of missions and training will further refine any SOP that a unit uses. Input from gunners, drivers, truck commanders, medics, and others will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the unit and give each Soldier more motivation to speak in support of change. This ensures that all activities are streamlined and that each Soldier can improve the existing SOPs for future operations.



First Lieutenant Carvelli is the battalion engineer for the 3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment. He has served as a task force engineer and sapper platoon leader with the 173d Special Troops Battalion. He holds a bachelor's in civil engineering technology from the Rochester Institute of Technology and has completed the Fundamentals of Engineering Exam in Pennsylvania.