INTRODUCTION TO PLANS AND ORDERS

Key Points

1 **Characteristics of Plans and Orders**

2 **Types of Plans and Orders**

Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.

GEN George S. Patton Jr.

Introduction

"Leadership is influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization."

Army Leadership, FM 6-22

In order to influence Soldiers and accomplish a mission, you must be able to articulate purpose, direction, and intent. You do that through timely, high-quality plans and orders. When communicated appropriately, such orders set the stage for success.

Plans and orders enable you to express your vision, intent, and decisions. They focus on the results you expect to achieve. Plans and orders form the basis for synchronizing military operations. As indicated by GEN Patton, they encourage initiative by providing the "what" and "why" of a mission, leaving the "how" to subordinates. Plans and orders give subordinates the operational and tactical freedom to accomplish the mission by providing the minimum restrictions and details necessary for synchronizing and coordinating.

Plans and orders permit you to prepare supporting plans and orders, implement instructions derived from a higher commander's plan or order, and focus your subordinates' activities. They also provide tasks and activities, constraints, and coordinating instructions necessary for accomplishing your mission; encourage agility, speed, and initiative during execution; and convey instructions in a standard, recognizable, clear, and simple format.

The amount of detail you provide in a plan or order depends on several factors. These include your subordinate leaders' experience and competence, your subordinate units' cohesion and tactical experience, and the operation's complexity. You must balance these factors with your guidance and intent, and then determine the type of plan or order to issue. To be clear and simple, your plans and orders should include annexes only when necessary. Annexes contain the details of support and synchronization necessary to accomplish the mission.

This chapter will give you the essential knowledge to compose an operation plan (OPLAN) or **operation order (OPORD)** in a standard, recognizable, clear, and simple format. An effective OPLAN or OPORD is not simply the sum of its parts, however. You must also effectively apply the Army standards for clear and forceful writing to ensure the order is clear, concise, and complete. Your accomplishment of your mission—and your Soldiers' lives—depend on clear communication.

The following comments of a company commander recently returned from combat highlight the importance of understanding OPLANs and OPORDs, combined with the need to give subordinates flexibility in implementing them.

operation order (OPORD)

directive issued by a commander to subordinate commanders for the purpose of effecting the coordinated execution of an operation

Train to Think Critically and Act Independently

The ability to think critically and make sound decisions in the absence of guidance is absolutely essential. . . . Training [Soldiers in] the ability to think critically and act independently is hard. You have to set the environment for your Troopers and allow them the opportunity to practice without reprisal. . . . It takes time to change the organizational mind-set of a unit. . . . Train junior leaders and every Soldier to understand how to get task, purpose, and end state out of an OPORD. . . .

Ensure your subordinates have an intimate knowledge of their unit's doctrinal missions, capabilities, and limitations. . . . Teach them how to read an OPORD to ensure they get the critical information from it. I used a curtailed mission analysis process for my guys. Tailor one for your own unit. . . . Actively seek to conduct centralized planning and decentralized execution of your missions (otherwise, there isn't much point to the whole thing). . . . Ensure you and your platoon leaders foster a command climate where you empower your subordinates to make decisions (important ones—or else you really are not changing much). . . . Be prepared to have to fix some mistakes. It will happen, your subordinates are human—you messed some stuff up as a PL [platoon leader]. . . . Be prepared to tough it out. There will likely be some questions and some initial complaining when you don't provide the level of supervision the troops may be used to. . . . Most importantly, give good, tailored guidance, but only give what you need to. Your Troopers will come back for more if they need it. . . . After three months of commanding in combat, I was confident that I could trust my Troopers to make the right decision time after time.

CPT Marshall Tway

Characteristics of Plans and Orders

To write a good operation order, you must do the following:

Include critical facts. Evaluate all facts and assumptions. Retain only those facts and assumptions that directly affect the operation and reassess them as needed. OPLANs include assumptions, OPORDs do not.

Write authoritatively. The plan reflects your intent. Therefore the plan or order's language must be direct and state exactly what you want your subordinate leaders to do.

Use positive expressions. Write your instructions as affirmative statements. For example, "1st Squad will remain at the forward operating base," rather than "1st Squad will not accompany. . . ."

Avoid qualified directives. Orders should be clear and decisive. Don't use meaningless or vague phrases like "as soon as possible (ASAP)." Avoid qualifiers or other unnecessary words such as "violently attack" instead of "attack" or "delay while maintaining enemy contact" instead of "delay."

Balance the level of control. Balancing centralized and decentralized control is an important leadership skill. To determine the appropriate balance for an operation, you must consider METT-TC—the mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations. Although it's critical to decentralize decision making authority to the lowest practical level during battle, you must work to maintain precision at the same time.

Keep it simple. Orders should be as simple as possible: The simplest plans are the easiest to understand.

Keep it brief. Be brief, clear, and concise. Include only the necessary details. Use short declarative sentences and paragraphs. Avoid including material covered in SOPs (standing operating procedures), but refer to the SOP.

Be clear. Since everyone who uses the order must understand it, avoid jargon. Watch for and eliminate wording that might cause subordinates to misunderstand your exact meaning.

Be complete. Include all the information your subordinates need to implement the order. Provide adequate means to maintain control, clearly establish command and support relationships, and fix responsibility for all tasks.

Coordinate. Good plans and orders provide for direct contact among subordinates. Fit together all warfighting functions for synchronized and decisive action. Identify mutual-support arrangements and minimize the chances of fratricide (friendly fire).

Stay flexible. Leave room for adjustments—the unexpected *will* occur. The best plans allow the most flexibility.

Be timely. Give your subordinates enough time to plan and prepare their actions. Accept substandard product from them only when time is short.

Critical Thinking

How do clear, concise, and complete orders contribute to your or your Soldiers' ability to show initiative during execution?

Critical Thinking

How does your ability to communicate effectively affect the mission's success?

Types of Plans and Orders

There are several types of plans, including operation plans, service support plans, and contingency plans.

Plans

plan

a design for a future or anticipated operation

A **plan** is a design for a future or anticipated operation. Plans come in many forms and vary in scope, complexity, and length of planning horizons. Strategic plans cover the overall conduct of a war. Operational or campaign plans cover a series of related military operations aimed at accomplishing a strategic or operational objective within a given time and space. Tactical plans cover the employment of units in operations, including the ordered arrangement and maneuver of units in relation to each other and to the enemy in order to use their full potential. As a platoon leader, you can expect to derive the majority of your experience from tactical plans.

Operation Plan (OPLAN)

operation plan (OPLAN)

any plan for the preparation, execution, and assessment of military operations

An **operation plan** (**OPLAN**) is any plan for the preparation, execution, and assessment of military operations. An OPLAN becomes an operation order (OPORD) when the commander sets an execution time. If time permits, you may begin preparation for possible operations by issuing an OPLAN.

Service Support Plan

service support plan

a plan that provides information and instructions covering service support for an operation

A **service support plan** provides information and instructions covering service support for an operation. Estimates of the command's operational requirements are the basis for a service support plan. The service support plan becomes a service support order when the commander sets an execution time for the OPLAN that the service support plan supports.

Contingency Plan

contingency plan

a plan for major contingencies that can reasonably be anticipated by the command

A **contingency plan** is a plan for major contingencies that the command can reasonably anticipate. Army forces prepare contingency plans as part of all operations. Contingency plans may take the form of branches or sequels. Operations never proceed exactly as planned. You prepare contingency plans to gain flexibility. Visualizing and planning branches and sequels are important because they involve transitions—changes in mission, type of operation, or forces required for execution. Unless you plan, prepare, execute, and assess transitions efficiently, they can reduce tempo, slow momentum, and cause you to give up the initiative.

Orders

There are several types of orders, including operation orders, service support orders, movement orders, warning orders, and fragmentary orders.

An **order** is a communication that is written, oral, or by signal, which conveys instructions from a superior to a subordinate. In a broad sense, the terms "order" and "command" are synonymous. However, an order implies discretion as to the details of execution, whereas a command does not. Generally, orders are either administrative in nature or focused on an operation and/or its service support.

Orders focused on operations or their service support are referred to as combat orders, of which there are five types: warning order (WARNO), operation order (OPORD), fragmentary order (FRAGO), service support order, and movement order. The following section describes in detail these five types of combat orders.

Whether in garrison or in a tactical environment, combat orders are the way you receive and transmit information—from the earliest notification that an operation will occur through the final steps of execution. In order to successfully do so, you must employ the eight steps in the troop leading procedures. As you will discover, WARNOs, OPORDs, and FRAGOs are absolutely critical to mission success.

In a tactical situation, you and your subordinate leaders work with combat orders on a daily basis, and everyone must have precise knowledge of the correct format for each type of order. At the same time, you must ensure that every Soldier in the platoon understands how to receive and respond to the various types of orders. The skills associated with orders are difficult to remember. Therefore, you must take every opportunity to train your platoon in the use of combat orders with realistic practice.

Combat orders are also critical to mission success in nontactical situations; you simply adjust the details that you provide in order to successfully execute the mission at hand.

order

a communication that is written, oral, or by signal, that conveys instructions from a superior to a subordinate

Operation Order (OPORD)

Traditionally, an OPORD is called the five-paragraph field order. It contains descriptions of:

- task organization
- situation
- mission
- execution
- administrative and logistics support
- command and signal for the operation.

OPORDs always specify an execution date and time. The amount of detail in an order depends on the experience and competence of subordinate leaders and the operation's complexity. See Figure 15.1 for the format of an OPORD.

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                              [Classification]
                      (Change from verbal orders, if any)

                                                      Copy ## of ## copies
                                                       Issuing headquarters
                                                             Place of issue
                                              Date-time group of signature
                                                 Message reference number

    OPERATION PLAN/ORDER [number] [code name]
    References:
    Time Zone Used Throughout the OPLAN/OPORD:
    Task Organization:
      1.  SITUATION.
          a.  Enemy forces.
          b.  Friendly forces.
          c.  Environment.
              (1)  Terrain.
              (2)  Weather.
              (3)  Civil Considerations.
          d.  Attachments and detachments.
          e.  Assumptions.
      2.  MISSION.
      3.  EXECUTION.
    Intent:
          a.  Concept of operations.
              (1)  Maneuver.
              (2)  Fire.
              (3)  Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance.
              (4)  Intelligence.
              (5)  Engineer.
              (6)  Air and Missile Defense.
              (7)  Information Operations.
              (8)  Nuclear, Biological, Chemical.
              (9)  Military Police.
              (10) Civil–Military Operations.
          b.  Tasks to maneuver units.
          c.  Tasks to other combat and combat support units.
          d.  Coordinating instructions.
              (1)  Time or condition when the plan/order becomes effective.
              (2)  CCIR (PIR, FFIR).
              (3)  Risk reduction control measures.
              (4)  Rules of engagement.
              (5)  Environmental considerations.
              (6)  Force protection.
              (7)  As required.

                              [Classification]
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Figure 15.1a Operations Order Format

Service Support Order

service support order

an order that directs the service support of operations, including administrative movements

A **service support order** is an order that directs the service support of operations, including administrative movements. Service support orders form the basis for the orders of supporting commanders to their units. They provide information on force sustainment to supported elements. Service support orders are issued with an OPORD. They may be issued separately, when the commander expects the force-sustainment situation to apply to more than one OPLAN/OPORD. The service support order follows the same format as the OPORD. It is usually in writing and may include overlays, traces, and other annexes.

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                              [Classification]
OPLAN/OPORD [number] [code name]—[issuing headquarters]
  4. SERVICE SUPPORT  (Support concept).
      a. Materiel and services.
      b. Health service support.
      c. Personnel.
      d. As required.
  5. COMMAND AND SIGNAL.
      a. Command.
      b. Signal.
  ACKNOWLEDGE:
                                            [Commander's last name]
                                            [Commander's rank]

  OFFICIAL:
  [Authenticator's Name]
  [Authenticator's Position]

  ANNEXES:

  DISTRIBUTION:




                              [Classification]
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Figure 15.1b Operation Order Format, continued

Movement Order

A **movement order** is an order issued by a commander covering the details for a move of the command. Movement orders usually concern administrative moves in the communications zone or rear area. The logistics officer has primary coordinating staff responsibility for planning and coordinating movements. This includes preparing, publishing, and distributing movement orders. Other coordinating and special staff officers assist the logistics officer. These may include the operations officer, provost marshal, transportation officers, and movement-control personnel.

movement order

an order issued by a commander covering the details for a move of the command

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[Classification]
(Change from verbal orders, if any) [Optional]
[Heading data is the same as for OPLAN/OPORD]

WARNING ORDER [number]
**References: Refer to higher headquarters OPLAN/OPORD, and identify map sheets
    for operation** (Optional)
Time Zone Used Throughout the Order: (Optional)
Task Organization: (Optional) (See paragraph 1c)

> A warning order does not authorize execution unless specifically stated.

  1. **SITUATION.**
    a. Enemy forces. Include significant changes in enemy composition, dispositions,
and COAs. Information not available can be included in subsequent WARNOs.
    b. Friendly forces. (Optional) Address only if essential to the WARNO.
      (1) Higher commander's mission.
      (2) Higher commander's intent.
    c. Environment. (Optional) Address only if essential to the WARNO.
      (1) Terrain.
      (2) Weather.
      (3) Civil considerations.
Attachments and detachments. Initial task organization. Address only major changes.
  2. **MISSION.** Issuing headquarters' mission. This may be the higher headquarters'
restated mission or commander's decisions during the MDMP.
  3. **EXECUTION.**
Intent:
    a. Concept of operations. This may be "to be determined" for the initial WARNO.
    b. Tasks to maneuver units. Any information on tasks to units for execution,
movement to initiate, reconnaissance to initiate, or security to emplace.
    c. Tasks to other combat and combat support units. See paragraph 3b.
    d. Coordinating instructions. Include any information available at the time of the
issuance of the WARNO. It may include the following:
      • CCIR.
      • Risk guidance.
      • Timeline.
      • Deception guidance.
      • Orders group meeting information.
      • Specific priorities, in order of completion.
      • Earliest movement time and degree of notice.
      • Guidance on orders and rehearsals.
  4. **SERVICE SUPPORT.** (Optional) Include any known logistics preparations.
    a. Special equipment. Identify requirements and coordinate transfer to using units.
    b. Transportation. Identify requirements, and coordinate for pre-position of assets.

[Classification]

Figure 15.2a Warning Order Format

Warning Order (WARNO)

A **warning order** is a preliminary notice of an order or action that is to follow. WARNOs help subordinate units and staffs prepare for new missions. They increase subordinates' planning time, provide details of the impending operation, and detail events that accompany preparation and execution. The amount of detail a WARNO includes depends on the information and time available when you issue it and the information subordinate commanders need for proper planning and preparation. See Figure 15.2 for the format of a WARNO.

A WARNO informs recipients of tasks they must do now or notifies them of possible future tasks. However, a WARNO does not authorize execution other than planning, unless the WARNO specifically states so. The content of WARNOs is based on two major variables: information available about the upcoming operation and special instructions. The information usually comes from your company commander.

You want your subordinates to take appropriate action, so normally you will issue WARNOs either as you receive additional orders from the company or as you complete your own analysis of the situation. In addition to alerting your unit to the upcoming operation,

warning order (WARNO)

a preliminary notice of an order or action that is to follow

[Classification]

5. **COMMAND AND SIGNAL.** (Optional)
    a. Command. State the chain of command if different from unit SOP.
    b. Signal. Identify the current SOI. Pre-position signal assets to support operation.

ACKNOWLEDGE:
[Authentication data is the same as for OPLAN/OPORD]

ANNEXES:

DISTRIBUTION:

[Classification]

Figure 15.2b Warning Order Format, continued

WARNOs allow you to issue tactical information incrementally and, ultimately, to shorten the length of your actual OPORD.

When issuing a WARNO, the words "warning order" precede the message text and follow the standard OPORD format. A WARNO may include:

- information about the maps required (if changed from the current OPORD)
- the enemy situation and significant intelligence events
- the higher headquarters' mission
- mission or tasks of the issuing headquarters
- the commander's intent statement
- orders for preliminary actions, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations
- coordinating instructions (estimated timelines, meetings of the orders group, and the time to issue the OPORD)
- service support instructions, any special equipment needed, regrouping of transport, or preliminary unit movements.

A coordinating or special staff officer may issue a WARNO if the commander, chief of staff, or executive officer approves.

Table 15.1 shows an example of how you might use WARNOs to alert your platoon and provide initial planning guidance.

Fragmentary Order (FRAGO)

fragmentary order (FRAGO)

an abbreviated form of an operation order, usually issued on a day-to-day basis that eliminates the need for restating information contained in a basic operation order

A **fragmentary order** is an abbreviated form of an OPORD (verbal, written, or digital), usually issued on a day-to-day basis, that eliminates the need for restating information contained in a basic operation order. It is issued after an OPORD to change or modify that order. FRAGOs include all five OPORD paragraph headings. After each heading, state either new information or "no change." This ensures that recipients know they have received the entire FRAGO. Commanders may authorize members of their staff to issue FRAGOs in their name. FRAGOs differ from OPORDs only in the degree of detail provided because they focus only on the information that has changed. FRAGOs refer to previous orders and provide brief and specific instructions. The higher headquarters issues a new OPORD when there is a complete change of the tactical situation or when the number of changes make the current OPORD ineffective.

TABLE 15.1	Example of Multiple Warning Orders	
PLATOON LEADER'S ACTION	**POSSIBLE CONTENT OF WARNING ORDER**	**PLATOON LEADER'S PURPOSE**
Receive the company warning order	*Warning order No. 1 covers:* • type of mission and tentative task organization • movement plan • tentative timeline • standard drills to be rehearsed.	• Prepare squads for movement to the tactical assembly area • Obtain map sheets.
Conduct METT-TC analysis	*Warning order No. 2 covers:* • friendly situation • enemy situation • security plan • terrain analysis • platoon mission.	• Initiate squad-level mission analysis • Initiate generic rehearsals (drill- and task-related) • Prepare for combat.
Develop a plan	*Warning order No. 3 covers:* • concept of the operation • concept of fires • subordinate unit tasks and purposes • updated graphics.	• Identify platoon-level reconnaissance requirements • Direct leader's reconnaissance • Prepare for combat.

[Classification]

(Change from verbal orders, if any)

Copy ## of ## copies
Issuing headquarters
Place of issue
Date-time group of signature
Message reference number

FRAGMENTARY ORDER [number]

References: Refer to the order being modified.

Time Zone Used Throughout the Order:

1. **SITUATION.** Include any changes to the existing order or state, "No change," for example, "No change to OPORD 02-XX."

2. **MISSION.** List the new mission or state, "No change."

3. **EXECUTION.** Include any changes or state, "No change."
Intent:
    a. **Concept of operations.**
    b. **Tasks to subordinate units.**
    c. **Coordinating instructions.** Include statement, "Current overlay remains in effect" or "See change 1 to annex C, Operations Overlay." Mark changes to control measures on the overlay or issue a new overlay.

4. **SERVICE SUPPORT.** Include any changes to existing order or state, "No change."

5. **COMMAND AND SIGNAL.** Include any changes to existing order or state, "No change."

ACKNOWLEDGE:

[Commander's last name]
[Commander's rank]

OFFICIAL:

[Authenticator's Name]
[Authenticator's Position]

ANNEXES:

DISTRIBUTION:

[Classification]

Figure 15.3 Fragmentary Order Format

Techniques for Issuing Orders

There are several techniques for issuing orders: verbal, written, or electronically produced using matrices or overlays. The five-paragraph format is the standard for issuing combat orders. Orders may be generated and disseminated by electronic means to reduce the amount of time needed to gather and brief the orders group. When available preparation time or resources are constrained, commanders may use the matrix method of issuing orders. At platoon level, you will primarily issue your orders verbally. For clarity and brevity, however, the five-paragraph order format is essential.

> **Operations orders do not win battles without the valour and endurance of the Soldiers who carry them out.**
>
> Field Marshall Viscount Wavell of Cyrenaica
> From P. G. Tsouras, editor, *The Greenhill Book of Military Quotations*

CONCLUSION

Without planning, Soldiers cannot carry out a leader's concept of an operation. Without an OPORD, Soldiers will not be directed to carry out the plan. Without well-organized and clearly written orders, the unit may not execute the commander's intent.

The speed, intensity, and decentralization of the Contemporary Operating Environment (COE) demand that you be able to quickly and clearly communicate the commander's intent and your intent for executing an order. You reduce the risk of failure when you compose an operations order following the TLP, apply the required formats to ensure the order is complete, and meet the Army's standards for clear communication. In the case of operations orders, as with no other writing task, your ability to communicate the commander's intent clearly and forcefully is a decisive leader skill.

Key Words

operation order (OPORD)
plan
operation plan (OPLAN)
service support plan
contingency plan
order
service support order
movement order
warning order (WARNO)
fragmentary order (FRAGO)

Learning Assessment

1. List the five basic types of orders.
2. Explain how OPORDs, WARNOs, and FRAGOs are related to the TLP.

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