OPERATION ORDER: CONCEPT, FORMAT AND EVOLUTION

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Abstract: The delivery of information from the highest command level to the execution level has always required the existence of a format that can ensure both the fluidity of information and the same language of communication for all soldiers involved in the process. This format, perfected over time, has provided the standard necessary for the development, transmission and especially understanding of the main documents specific to the planning of operations, and here I have in mind the concept, plan or different types of operation orders.

Keywords: paragraph; format; operation order; operation plan; staff; operation; evolution; mission; objectives.

The concept of operation order

In general, a plan can be a project or outline that ensures the implementation of a decision on future or anticipated activities. It cannot be stable because in the military field, a plan covers a certain period of time and refers to future actions and operations and the general staff must make *assumptions*[1] on the *operational environment*[2] and the actual beginning of the operation. Not only the revision of the estimates of the general staff and of the planning hypotheses, but also the actions of the actors and the orientations of the upper echelons lead to the need for the plan to be revised in order to be able to reflect these changes.

An operation plan is the mechanism by which a command level plans and conducts a military operation. Regardless of the type of operation, its preparation involves the elaboration of a plan, while the execution requires the existence of an order. The planning and execution of an operation should not be analyzed and thought of as two independent activities, because their indispensable elements, the plan and the order, are inseparable. The differences between the plan and the order are mainly reported to the participants, the information available and the timing of the action, so that „*an operation plan may be put into effect at a prescribed time, or on signal, and then becomes the operation order*"[3].

If initially only the format of an operation order was discussed, for obvious reasons related to the early development of the general staff, execution and action, over time, the balance began to tilt towards the format of the plan and operation order. Nowadays, planning documents treat both the plan and the order equally and, as a result, the tactical level has similar formats.

The format of an operation order or plan has always been a topic of discussion among the military, regardless of the level where it is issued. Battlefield testing, establishing military planners, and the need for an order to accurately convey the information needed to implement a plan have led to a variety of forms and approaches.

The standard five-paragraph format, as it is known in the military, has shown over time that it has the flexibility to cover the most complex issues of a military operation, either in peacetime or in times of crisis and conflict. The basic idea of this format is that it provides the elements of information, analysis, decision making and dissemination, necessary for the implementation of a decision. At the same time, it combines art with the science of war. The art resides in the way in which the commander ensures the fluidity of the process by issuing the intention, the orientations and the directions, while the existence of the paragraphs and the way

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[1] COPD presents these assumptions as *planning hypotheses.*

[2] *The operation environment* is defined as a composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander; AAP-06, NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions (English and French), North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NSO, 2020, p. 94.

[3] *** AJP-5, *Allied Joint Doctrine for the Planning of Operations*, NSO, 2019, p. Lex-12.

in which the information is systematized, through the contribution of the general staff, represents the scientific part.

The *simplicity* of an order derives from its progressive organization. Starting from the *situation* existing at the time of its issuance (first paragraph), the second paragraph establishes clearly and without unambiguous terms the *mission* of the structure. Based on the established mission, the third paragraph describes *how the mission* will be fulfilled, the fourth paragraph presents the necessary *support* for its accomplishment, while the fifth establishes the way in which the action will be *conducted and coordinated*.

But how can a format, relatively simple in terms of structure (number of paragraphs), contribute to solving the complex problems of a war? The answer may be identified in the rather long use of this format or in the minor changes, it had over time. As a rule, these changes consisted more in adding sub-paragraphs (based on the experience gained in conflicts) than in reorganizing or amending existing paragraphs so that each of them could provide the information needed to understand the situation and make appropriate estimates.

Evolution of the operation order

The evolution of orders must be seen in the same context as the evolution of military art, so the first orders (not necessarily the operation ones) related to a battle or conflict probably were the verbal ones. Simple and easy to understand by the military from various social categories, the orders had to emphasize the will of the leader to conduct the operation in the relationship with the ground and the enemy. Perhaps for those times it was the correct option, by which a commander addressed the fighters directly, thus being able to transmit more than simple directions or tactics. At the same time, the personal example of leaders, which could replace the shortcomings of a strategy or communication to subordinates, should not be neglected. The inevitable evolution of the military, but especially of the way of thinking about conducting a battle, highlighted the fact that discipline and, especially, the training of the military are above personal example or numerical superiority.

The development of the armies, the technological innovations in the military field, the evolution of the tactics on the battlefield led to the physical impossibility of using the verbal orders transmitted directly to the fighters or army leaders. In this way, the replacement of verbal and written orders appeared as a necessity, of course, with the inherent difficulties: literacy of both leaders and subordinates, providing copies of orders for all structures in the timeframe necessary for implementation, the development of a language appropriate to the new format, the existence of maps and of the way in which they are designed and interpreted or the training of leaders in the use of the new way of leading armies.

Military history offers two different ways of preparing and drafting orders. While the former recommends a well-defined line of conduct for subordinates, providing both the details of implementation and solutions to unforeseen situations that may arise, in the latter case the approach refers to specifying the objective to be achieved, leaving the mode of action to those in charge of execution[4].

In this context, Napoleon's mastermind in training, but especially in leading military campaigns and battles is well known. His habit of providing for each general or marshal orders with a large volume of information, carefully formulated, often detailed in minutes and presenting solutions to different situations that could arise on the battlefield, ensured clear victories at the beginning of the campaign. Of course, the inherent problems of this approach must also be taken into account: such elaborate instructions given before a battle did not provide the time needed to deepen and understand them, nor could they cover all the situations in which the

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[4] Major Eben Swift, *Field Orders, Messages and Reports*, US Staff College, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1906, p. 12.

opponent could act. Moreover, the fact that the general staff was not used led both to Napoleon's overworking and to the inability of his subordinates to replace him.

For example, the outcome of the Battle of Jena is well known, but it is interesting how Napoleon prepared it, even though there were syncopes and asynchronizations during it[5]. A summary of the Order on the Use of Troops, submitted by the Chief of Staff, Marshal Berthier, is presented below:

GENERAL ORDERS DISPOSlTIONS FOR ORDER OF BATTLE
Bivouac at Jena, 14 October, 1806

Marshal Augereau will command the left. He will place his 1st Division in column on the Weimar road, on a line so that General Gazan may place his Artillery on the plateau [...]

Marshal Lannes will have at daybreak, all his Artillery in his intervals, and in the order of battle in which he has passed the night.

The Artillery of the Imperial Guard will he placed on the high ground and the guard will be in rear of the plateau, drawn up in five lines, the first line consisting of chasseurs on top of the plateau.

The village which is on your right will be bombarded by all the Artillery of General Suchet and immediately attacked and captured.

The Emperor will give the signal; everything is to be ready at daybreak.

Marshal Ney will be posted, at daybreak, at the edge of the plateau, to move up on it and advance on the right of Marshal Lannes. [...]

Marshal Soult will advance by the road which has been reconnoitred on the right and will constantly keep connected to support the retreat of the Army

The order of battle in general will be, for the Marshals to form in two lines exclusive of the Light Infantry; the distance between the two lines will be 100 fathoms. [...]

By Command of the Emperor.

MARSHAL BERTHIER[6]

However, Napoleon failed to create a functional system that would meet the requirements and the way he thought of a campaign, given that his deputy, Berthier, organized an effective general staff, but this was only a transmission belt for the Emperor's orders[7].

The US military identified the need to standardize the execution and transmission of orders after the *Civil War*, when the orders used during it were of different types and with different formats, or were replaced by letters of instruction. The experience of military campaigns during the war was not used, even though many coherent and strong examples of letters containing orders were issued[8].

The outcome of the Battle of Jena favored the emergence and development of the Prussian General Staff in the Prussian army, a component that redefined the leadership of an army and contributed to the clarification and simplification of directives and operation orders. After the Jena episode, the Germans took over the way of leading the troops patented by Napoleon, succeeding where he had failed, respectively in the realization of a system to ensure the planning and conduct of battles, given a particularly important element, namely ensuring the mobility of armies, an issue which was highlighted during the Franco-Prussian War. The

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[5] While Emperor Napoleon was fighting a Prussian army at Jena, Marshal Davout achieved an impressive victory at Auerstaedt, also against the Prussians, without the help of Marshal Bernadotte, who could have supported him.
[6] Major C. H. Corlett, *Infantry, The Evolution of Field Orders,* in *The Coast Artillery Journal*, Vol. 62 No.6, June, 1925, Whole No. 226, pp. 507-508, disponibil la https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015 025911259 &view=1up&seq=523&q1=corlett, accessed on 04.02.2021
[7] Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, *Tratat de strategie*, Editura UNAp „Carol I'', Bucureşti, 2006, p. 93.
[8] Major C. H. Corlett, *Infantry, The Evolution of Field Orders,* in *The Coast Artillery Journal*, Vol. 62, No.6, June, 1925, Whole No. 226, p. 512.

example of German rigor (somewhat opposed to the approach adopted by Napoleon) can be identified in one of the orders issued during the confrontation between Germans and French (August 2, 1870, 4.30 p.m., General Staff), presented below:

"So far as our intelligence enables us to judge, the enemy's main forces are in the act of retiring through Metz over the Moselle. His Majesty commands:

The I. army to advance to-morrow, the 13th, toward the French Nied, main body on the line Les Etangs – Pange, and hold the rail way station at Courcelles; cavalry to reconnoiter in the direction of Metz and cross the Moselle below it. The I. army will then cover, the right flank of the II.

The latter to march on the line Buchy – Chateau Salins, push its outposts to the Seille, and endeavor, if possible, to secure the passages of the River Moselle at Pont-à-Mousson, Dieulouard, Marbac, etc.; cavalry to reconnoiter beyond the Moselle.

The III. army to continue the advance towards the line Nancy Lunéville.

v. Moltke."[9]

The basis of the five-paragraph order seems to have been the *Order of the Field Service* of the German Army, drawn up in 1887, as a natural consequence of the development of the General Staff and its recognition as the most effective military organization in the world[10].

Established on the basis of the experience of the wars fought but also of the preoccupations of modernizing the training of the troops, the operation order from 1887 had an overflowing simplicity, in comparison with the existing approach in the current manuals: *"Intelligence regarding the enemy (so far as important to the recipient), so much of the writer's own general intention as is requisite for the troops to know, the task of each unit of command affected by the orders, the order for detached baggage, commissariat, and ammunition columns (so far as it is important to the troops), and finally the position of the commander at the commencement of the movement"*[11].

At the level of the same German Army, in the *Felddienst Ordnung* translated into English in 1908 as *Field Service Regulations of the German Army*, it was stipulated that for directing troops by commanders of the upper echelons, the rule[12] was the written order but the type of operation and the complexity of the order could also impose the verbal order as an alternative. In the case of the use of the written order, even if its structure had not undergone major changes compared to 1887, the regulation specified that it should be organized in numbered paragraphs, but the details of a particular subject could also be combined in a single paragraph. [13]

The same regulation establishes the characteristics and limits of an order[14]: to contain everything that is essential for the recipient to know in order to fulfil its mission, to be clear and concise (clarity of expression, which can leave no doubt and it is preferable to the literary form), precise and complete, to be adapted to the intellectual capacity of the beneficiary, and under certain circumstances, to his personal characteristics[15].

"The art of framing orders is not a natural gift, nor can it be learned from any text-book, for it involves the solutions to various tactical problems;" stated the Prussian general,

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[9] Major Eben Swift, *Field Orders, Messages and Reports*, US Staff College, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1906, p. 11.

[10] Clayton R. Newell, *The framework of operational warfare,* Routledge, London, 1991, p. 170.

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 170.

[12] ***Field Service Regulations (Felddienst Ordnung, 1908) of the German Army*, Translated by the General Staff, War Office, London, 1908, p. 12.

[13] ***Field Service Regulations (Felddienst Ordnung, 1908) of the German Army*, Translated by the General Staff, War Office, London, 1908, p. 13.

[14] Orders were classified in *operations order, special and routine.*

[15] ***Field Service Regulations (Felddienst Ordnung, 1908) of the German Army*, Translated by the General Staff, War Office, London, 1908, pp. 12-16.

Griepenkerl, in his book *Letters on Applied Tactics*[16]. Addressed to future students at the War College[17], to officers who were to work in the General Staff, or to those who wished to refresh their tactical knowledge, the letters (actually 26 tactical problems) could provide German officers with the foundation for high level military training.

Focusing on the content of the order, and in the background its form[18], Griepenkerl suggested drafting an order in a register or on a draft and then checking it to see if it met the author's requirements. In his view, an order was to[19]:

1. have a logical order, and the organization of information on paragraphs on the same subject was particularly important;
2. be as short as possible, the short sentences being easier to understand, the style developed not being specific to the military field;
3. be very clear and intelligible;
4. be positive in order to give subordinates confidence in performing each task with determination;
5. not to violate the responsibilities of subordinates, leaving them specific details of execution;
6. not to detail actions from the too distant future, thus avoiding presumptions or hypotheses;
7. present the specific elements of time and location as accurately as possible to exclude the possibility of errors.

The establishment and adoption of a structure for the orders of operation of the various categories of forces appeared to be indispensable, the arguments in this respect being quite well founded. The grouping of information on certain fields leads to their synthesis but, to the same extent, to the identification of missing or unclearly defined information. In addition, the existence of a standard format helps to establish a language of communication between planners at different levels and to optimize the time needed to plan and conduct an operation.

The simple phrase that defined an order, characteristic of German thinking about planning and waging a war, was refined and transformed into a standardized order in the US military. The craftsman of this transformation is considered Major Eben Swift, known as a military reformer, who in the period 1894 - 1897, through a series of lectures and articles, proposed the standardization of operation orders in five paragraphs. In the article "*The Lyceum at Fort Agawam*"published in 1897 in the *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States*, Eben Swift proposed to group the information in a logical order and in a way that would be respected every time (without naming paragraphs), thus avoiding the omission of important information. In summary, the proposal was aimed at[20]:

I – information about the enemy and the general situation that must be known by subordinates;

II – elements of the general plan considered necessary for the proper cooperation of all parts of the command;

III – arrangements to be made for the fulfilment of the preceding paragraph, as well as the tasks assigned to each of the elements of the order;

[16] *Letters on Applied Tactics. Problems dealing with the operations of detachments of the three arms (7th edition)*, Devised and discussed by Major General Griepenkerl, Commandant of the Fortress of Thorn, Authorized Translation by Lieut-col C.H. Barth, Franklin Hudson Publishing CO., Kansas City, 1914, p. 1.
[17] Preußische Kriegsakademie.
[18] Griepenkerl stated that the different formats of the orders of that period were not established according to a particular whim, but were based on practical considerations, the form being ultimately a means to the intended purpose.
[19] Letters on Applied Tactics, *Problems dealing with the operations of detachments of the three arms* (7th edition), *op.cit.*, pp. 7-11.
[20] Clayton R. Newell, *The framework of operational warfare,* Routledge, London, 1991, pp. 169-171.

IV – the necessary instructions regarding the train, so that it does not interfere with the troops or does not amplify the confusion of the fight;

V – the place of the commander or the place where the reports should be sent.

At the level of the same army, in the period before the First World War, *Eben Swift* makes a new proposal on the format of the operation order, presented below[21]:

1. The *caption* is the heading of the order and consists of establishment of the identification elements of the order (issuer, date and place of issue, order number).
2. The *margin*, called the Troops, shows the component parts of the command
3. The *body* of the order is divided into numbered paragraphs without titles.

Paragraph 1 contains information about the enemy and the general situation of organic troops;

Paragraph 2 contains the objectives of the movement or the instructions necessary for cooperation during the movement;

Paragraph 3 contains the disposition of the troops adopted by the commander to carry out the previous paragraph;

Paragraph 4, with few exceptions, contains all the necessary orders for the regimental train, ammunition columns and medical corps;

Paragraph 5, with few exceptions, contains the necessary information on where the commander can be found or where messages may be sent;

4. The *ending* contains the authentication of the order by signature and a statement showing how the order is communicated to the troops.

The model presented in 1906 demonstrates an evolution of the one from 1897, possibly as a result of the lessons learned, derived from the use of the first model during the applications and exercises carried out.

The order of operation has evolved over time, been tested during the two World Wars and has been permanently improved, with the sole purpose of ensuring a standard format that is consistent with doctrinal changes, the technological revolution or the sizing of forces. Logically, the evolution of the format of the operation order took place with the diversification of the means of drafting and transmitting it.

For example, at the level of the Soviet army, the transmission of tactical missions to the structures involved in the execution could be achieved by[22]:

➢ verbal communication of the mission by the commander in person to the subordinate commanders;
➢ the transmission of fragmentary orders by the available means;
➢ dissemination to subordinates of documents specific to operations in written, graphic or tape-recorded form;
➢ combining the procedures presented above.

The establishment and transmission of missions to subordinates by verbal order had a special significance, because the confidentiality of the planned actions and the secrecy regarding the preparations inherent in an operation were kept confidential. For obvious reasons, a verbal order could be transformed into a written order, which has the following structure[23]:

1. assessing the enemy;
2. the mission of the structure established by the commander of the upper echelon;
3. the senior commander's procedure for the employment of weapons in the zone assigned to his subunit;

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[21] Major Eben Swift, *Field Orders, Messages and Reports*, US Staff College, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1906, p. 17.
[22] D.A. Ivanov, V.P. Savel'yev, P. V. Shemanskiy, *Fundamentals of Tactical Command and Control – A Soviet View* (în original *ОСНОВЫ УПРАВЛЕНИЯ ВОЙСКАМИ В БОЮ),* Moscow, 1977, p. 236.
[23] *Ibidem*, pp. 238-241.

4. the concept operations of the commander who draws up the order;
5. missions for subordinate structures *(After the phrase "I order," individual paragraphs denoted by letters in alphabetical order present the tactical missions of the subordinate subunits);*
6. readiness time for action/combat;
7. place and time of deployment of the control posts;
8. chain of command.

This approach used by the Soviet Union after World War II was characterized by centralization and detail in the sense that the upper echelon directed in detail the activity of subordinates providing information about the enemy, cooperation with adjacent structures, use of weapons systems or detailed tactical missions.

The experience of conflicts in recent decades has also shaped the way orders are written, with the German simplicity being complemented by the complexity and diversity of the operational environment. If today we can say that the format of an operation order can help and simplify its drafting, it is due to the efforts made by each army to understand that the time available for the preparation of an operation must be organized so as to meet the established objectives.

The form of the operation plan/order

An operation order must meet two important conditions. First of all, it must provide the information necessary for the actions of the subordinate structures, in a standard format that facilitates the transmission but, above all, the understanding of the message. Secondly, it must ensure the commencement and conduct of military actions in a coordinated manner, in the spirit of the senior commander's intention. The current manuals and doctrines specific to operations planning emphasize that the evolution of the modern combat environment determines commanders to convey to subordinates, through orders, *what to do* and *not how to do* it. In this way, the freedom of action offered to them encourages the initiative, with direct implications on the more efficient fulfilment of the assumed objectives.

At the level of the North Atlantic Organization, the standardization of orders is achieved with the help of STANAG 2014, so that, with its appearance in 2000, the format of an order and, subsequently of an operation plan, was very clear: *Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration/Logistics, Command and signal*[24]. Historical heritage and national contributions have led to this form identified as suitable for use during the Alliance's exercises and operations. Success at the Alliance's level has led to the adoption and adaptation of the format at the level of each Member State.

A winning military strategy is based on the permanent corroboration of the ends, ways and means, so that, based on the desired end state established at the politico-military level, the necessary means are allocated and the best ways to achieve these means are decided.[25] In this approach, *the mission of the structure* can represent the purpose to be achieved while the *Execution* (through the *conception of the operation* and the *missions for the subordinate structures*) covers the ways and means that lead to reaching the end state.

It should be noted that the same organization proposes with the arrival of new documents, that legislate the operations planning, formats and approaches slightly different from the established STANAG. For the joint level, the *Allied Doctrine for the Planning of Operations –*

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[24] ***, STANAG 2014 TOP (Edition 9), *Formats for orders and designations of timings, locations and boundaries*, MAS, 2000, p. B-1.
[25] ***, *Doctrina Armatei României*, Statul Major General, Bucureşti, 2012, p. 71.

AJP-5 clearly states that the format for design and plan[26] is identical, as detailed in the COPD[27,28]. In turn, the COPD establishes, for the same level, a format with 6 paragraphs: *Situation, Operational Mission, Operational Direction, Execution, Service Support, Command and Signal*[29]. The characteristics of the operational level, the comprehensive approach of the operations, the reality of the operational art transposed into design led to the need to modify the standard format of a plan and to a re-arrangement of the important paragraphs. An important element to be noted in this format is that the paragraphs contain quite a few sub-paragraphs (35 in number, many of them divided even more), to which quite a number of annexes are attached. Omitting responsibilities and the need for interaction with non-military organizations and structures, but especially the characteristics of the operational level, this format can seem cumbersome, time consuming and complicated. However, an optimal sizing of the planning group and an effective commitment of the commander, can turn this unacceptable situation into a series of effective activities, resulting in a complete plan, ready to implement.

The six paragraphs currently used for the development of a joint level operational plan are not different from the standard format, on closer inspection it can be seen that the information in paragraph 3 of the 2014 STANAG format can be found in paragraphs 3 and 4 of COPD. It is possible that at the component level the situation will be slightly different, if we take as an example the model plan presented in the *Allied Joint Doctrine for Air and Space Operations – AJP 3.3*, which includes the paragraphs of STANAG 2014[30].

In conclusion, the format of an operation plan / order reflects the historical evolution of a century of war, was modified based on lessons learned and, most importantly, tested in combat. The logical order of the paragraphs in which the information in one provides the framework for the development of the next paragraph, makes it possible to transmit that information that triggers the planning process and execution at the level of subordinate structures.

The number of paragraphs, sub-paragraphs and specific annexes may lead to criticism of the format, which no longer has the flexibility of the version generated by Prussian military mind-set. However, the characteristics of the operational environment, the versatility of the opponents and the complex situations that might arise represent solid arguments in favour of the current formats.

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[26] Within NATO, the operational level elaborates a *conception and an operation plan* whose formats are presented in the COPD, respectively the *Joint Coordination Order*. For the tactical/component level, the document formats are presented in the doctrines specific to force structures.

[27] Allied Command Operations Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive.

[28] ***, AJP-5, *Allied Joint Doctrine for the Planning of Operations*, NSO, 2019, pp. 4-38.

[29] ***, COPD INTERIM V2.0, Allied Command Operations Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive, 04 octombrie 2013, p. D-7-1.

[30] ***, AJP - 3.3, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Air and Space Operations*, Edition B, Version 1, NSO, 2016, pp. 4-16.

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