



## **Lesson 4: The Field Order**

Reference: **FM 101-5**

**Study assignment:** Review **FM 101-5**, Section II, paragraphs 66-67, 71; Form 5 (pp. 79-80); Appendix III.

### **Plans and orders**

The Army runs on orders: special orders, general order, standing orders of all kinds. Administrative orders deal with noncombat tasks—generally administration and logistics—but for our purposes we will deal with orders directing combat operations.

### **Types of field orders**

We will look at three kinds of combat orders: the FO (field order), the warning order (WO), and the FRAGO (fragmentary order). Both have direct application to reenactor field exercises, and are designed to be straightforward and understandable. When I commanded in combat (many years ago, I admit), I briefed a FO every day we were operating. In those days, we called it an operation order (OPORD), but the format was almost identical to that used in WW II. The format and contents are pretty much the same from a squad-size patrol to a Corps attack order.

Why do we go through this? Movie buffs may remember a line from the late Walter Brennan in "Northwest Passage", as the old veteran explains to a recruit the standing orders of Rogers' Rangers in the French and Indian War: *Don't forget nothing*. There was a lot of wisdom in those orders, and this admonition is what gives life to the FO. If you get all giggly and creative telling soldiers what to do, you are likely to forget something. So we provide a standard structure to keep you focused on the job. In Ranger School or advanced course or in any combat assignment you can do it in your sleep—if you have time to sleep.

### **The five paragraph field order**

Here it is, from Army Doctrine's version of *Leviticus*:

Issuing Unit  
Place of Issue  
Date and hour of issue

FO \_\_\_\_<sup>1</sup>

Map: [Reference to map sheet; important because the overlays are keyed to a particular map]

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<sup>1</sup> Field Orders were numbered consecutively by year – e.g., "FO 44-17."

## 1. INFORMATION<sup>2</sup>

- a. Enemy. Composition, disposition, locations, movements, strength; identifications; capabilities. If there is a published intelligence summary, you may simply reference it.
- b. Friendly forces. Missions and operations and locations of next higher and adjacent units; same for covering forces or elements of the command in contact; support to be provided by other forces.

## 2. MISSION.

Details of the plan applicable to the command as a whole and necessary for coordination; a simple statement of what the command will accomplish.

### *TROOPS*<sup>3</sup>

(Composition of tactical elements of the command, if they differ from current organization)

## 3. TACTICAL MISSIONS FOR SUBORDINATE UNITS.<sup>4</sup>

Specific tasks assigned to each element of the command charges with execution of tactical duties which are not matters of routine or covered by standing operating procedure. A separate lettered paragraph for each element to which instructions are given.

x. Instructions applicable to two or more elements or to the entire command, but which are not applicable to any specific element and do not properly belong under another paragraph. [The last lettered paragraph in a section is always "x" no matter where it would fall relative to previous paragraphs.]<sup>5</sup>

## 4. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS.<sup>6</sup>

Instructions to tactical elements concerning supply, evacuation, and traffic details which are required for the operation (unless, again, they are part of the SOP or administrative orders; if admin orders are published, you may simply refer to them).

## 5. SIGNAL COMMUNICATIONS.<sup>7</sup>

- a. Orders for employment of signal communications unless they are covered in the signal operating instructions (SOI). Refer to signal annex or SOI if they have been issued.
- b. Command posts and axes of signal communications. Initial locations of command posts, time of opening, estimated subsequent locations. Other places where messages can be sent [that means, without saying it in a discouraging way, that radios can malfunction and CPs can be knocked out, so there should be alternate means of relaying messages].

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<sup>2</sup> Now called "SITUATION."

<sup>3</sup> Now called "Troops available" and "Task Organization."

<sup>4</sup> Now called "EXECUTION."

<sup>5</sup> Now called "coordinating instructions."

<sup>6</sup> Now called "ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS."

<sup>7</sup> Now called "COMMAND AND SIGNAL."

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Commander

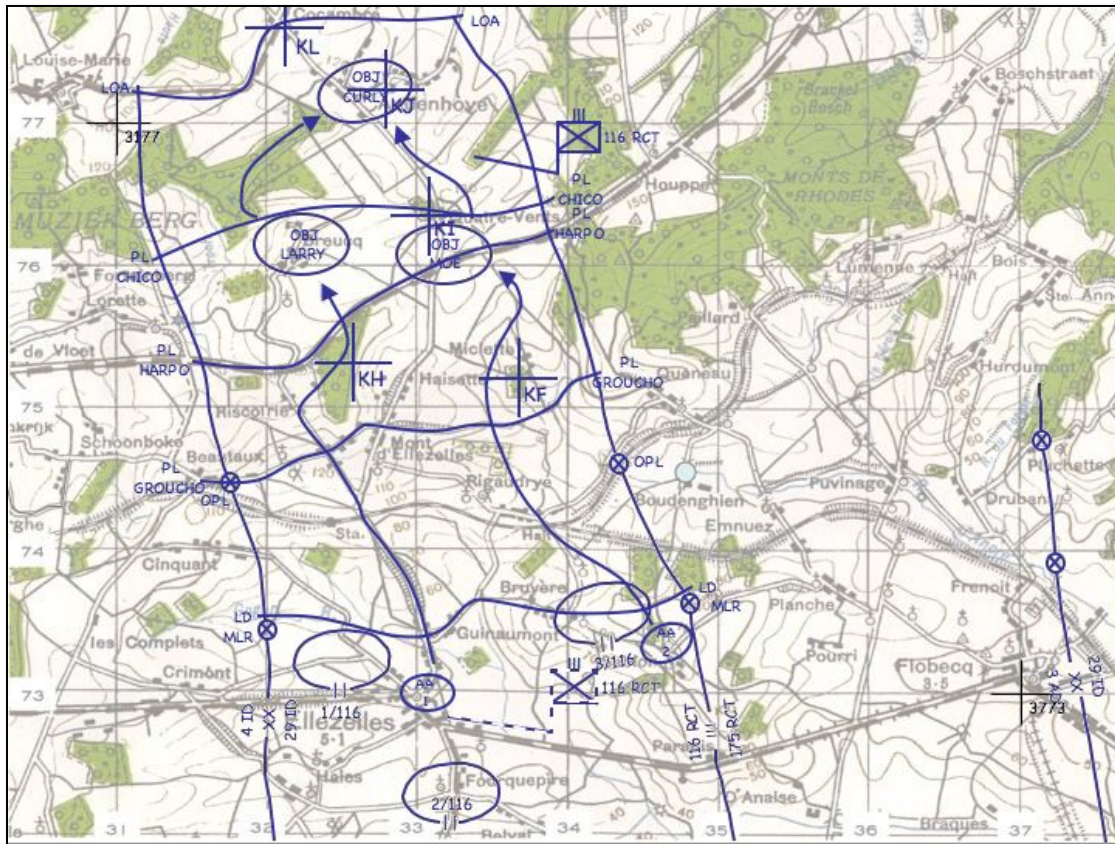
- Authentication
- Annexes (listed)
- Distribution

### Example

We will continue the case discussed in Lesson 3, using the commander's estimate and staff estimates to create a field order.

After the commander makes his decision, he and his S-3 (operations officer) will start work filling in details and making the operation clear to the HQ that will receive the FO. This is generally all subordinate commanders at the next level (in this case, mostly the battalion commanders of 116 RCT and the CO of A/747 TD BN). The battalion commanders and their staffs will make up their own FOs dealing with how they will execute the regimental mission.

Drum roll, please: Here are the main overlay and FO text:



HQ 116th RCT  
ELLEZELLES, Belgium  
1030 9 Oct 44

FO 44-17

Map: ELLEZELLES, Belgium 1:50000

1. INFORMATION

a. Enemy forces. Enemy forces in sector remain on the defense after a long period of retrograde. To the front in sector is remnants of 423 Regiment, 377 VGD. See ANNEX A (Intelligence summary).

c. Friendly forces. V Corps continues advance into Belgium against determined resistance. 175th RCT on our right flank continues attack north to BOSCHSTRAET 368774, 4th ID to left attacks north to secure vic. LOUISE-MARIE 306773.

2. MISSION.

116 RCT attacks 0530 10 Oct 44 to secure road junction at AUDENHOVE 325772 through BREUCQ 321760 and QUATRE-VENTS 331754.

TROOPS

Task Force 1/116 - 1/116 INFANTRY

Task Force 2/116 - 2/116 INFANTRY

Task Force 3/116 - 3/116 INFANTRY and A/706 TK BN

3. TACTICAL MISSIONS FOR SUBORDINATE UNITS.

a. TF 1/116 will on departure of other maneuver elements leave current positions and constitute the reserve of the 116 RCT attack, following the direction of attack of Team 2/116 and moving on order to support either attack.

b. TF 2/116 shifts from reserve at 0330 9 Oct and moves to AA1, prepared to move to LD NLT 0430. Cross LD at 0530 and atk north to secure OBJ LARRY. On order, continue attack with TF 3/116 to secure OBJ CURLY.

c. TF 3/116 moves from current positions to AA2 NLT 0330, combines with A/706 TK BN, latter under operational control of CO 3/116 RCT until relieved. Move to cross LD NLT 0530 and proceed along direction of attack to secure OBJ MOE. On order, continue attack to secure OBJ CURLY in coordination with TF 2/116.

d. Cannon Company 116 RCT provides fire support; see ANNEX B (fire support).

x. A/706 Tk Bn under operational control of TF 3/116 at 0500 9 Oct 44. Elements will observe the limit of advance following occupation of OBJ CURLY.

#### 4. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS.

See ANNEX C (Administration)

#### 5. SIGNAL COMMUNICATIONS.

c. Orders for employment of signal communications. Maneuver units will report arrival at phase lines. See SOI.

d. Command posts and axes of signal communications. HQ 116 RCT will establish a forward command post at 0300 9 Oct; this HQ will follow the advance of TF 3/116 and displace forward as circumstances allow to vic location shown on overlay.

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Commander

#### Annexes (listed)

- A - Intelligence Summary
- B - Fire Support
- C - Administration

#### Distribution

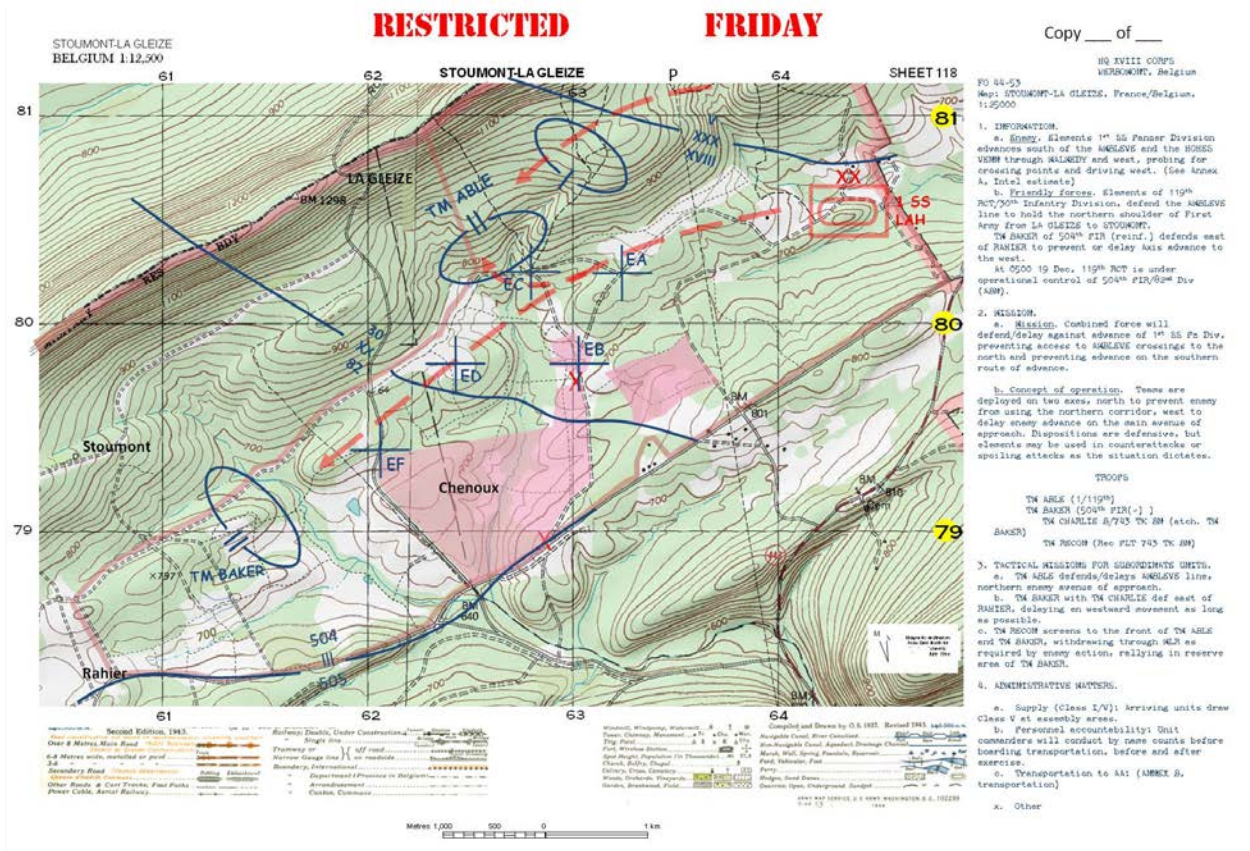
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We will generally never have to worry about administration and logistics in any detail; most of that section in the hobby will involve transportation to and from the field, personnel accountability, safety, rations, and ammunition.

#### **FO and overlay**

The FO and the overlay are essential and complementary elements of the order. Both refer to the map that is to be used in the operation, and use of the overlay as a graphic supplement saves quite a few words in the written FO.

For several years I have combined all three elements into one sheet for the Gap exercise:



In this format, printed on 13x17 tabloid paper, the overlay is printed directly on the map, and the FO text is on the right margin (excess text is continued on the reverse). In the actual case, there would be three separate sheets: the map; which you would probably have been issued before; the overlay printed by large-format spirit duplicator ("jellyroll"); and a mimeographed FO text. At battalion, the S-3 staff assistants would trace the overlay on sections of semi-transparent vellum. The advantage of this approach (if there was one!) is that the original map can be reused multiple times. These event maps are generally used only once. It is also useful to note that it is easy to dispose of a tissue overlay if your command post is about to be overrun by the enemy!

## The warning order

Combat operations are almost always time-constrained—there is never enough leisure to perform all the necessary tasks one at a time. If a combat order is being contemplated at higher HQ, the commander will generally precede it with a Warning Order so subordinate units can start preparing before the finished order is ready for issue.

The composition of the warning order is similar to the standard combat order, but contains only those instructions necessary for preparation and already decided upon by the commander. It can be oral or written, based on the complexity of the preparations and the time available.

## The fragmentary order

Frag orders are issued as needed to supplement combat orders already in force; they are usually amendments to the complete order, often as the result of enemy action or other surprises. They are short of a full order—that is, "fragmentary"—and address only variations to the original order. They may be oral or written, and may be accompanied by sketches or maps or new overlays as needed. Frag orders are common in reenactor workd.

## Field orders and the reenactor

As mentioned before, this process may seem overly complicated or fussy. In fact, it has proven over more than a century of practice to be the *simplest method that meets all the requirements of planning and executing combat operations*.

As Clausewitz noted, and many commanders have verified, "the most important things are simple; the simplest things are hard." If you learn to think in an organized manner, you will focus on the simplest things in a way that lets you build a coherent operation.

But it's also true that an operation is like a Lego set: you have a whole playbook full of pieces to work with in building your plan. The same assemblies of Lego pieces appear again and again in plans and orders, so you don't have to build everything from the bottom up, time after time: you just put the appropriate, usually familiar, parts together in record time. You're never starting from zero.

I get occasional complaints about exercises in which the plan is changed. The usual gripe is: "why do all this planning if you aren't going to stick to the FO?" Some misquote Moltke and Clausewitz and others and assert that "no plan survives the first shot."

That's not what Clausewitz meant. The shortest way of stating the warning is: *the enemy always gets a vote*. We will almost always have to change a plan in some details depending on the progress on the ground and how the enemy responds (we have little control over the latter). But if we start with a sound plan we are better off by far. It's easier to change a plan than to stumble hopefully upon the enemy and pull a plan from our nether parts.

Most changes of plan are delivered as fragmentary orders; if we don't have a plan to begin with, we have no way of producing fragments of it for revision. Think about that at length before you go into the field.



## LESSON SUMMARY

1. We will usually deal with three kinds of orders: the field (or combat) order, the warning order, and the fragmentary order.
2. The FO is the result of the plans and estimates steps covered in Lesson 3, and has five basic paragraphs: *Information*, describing the enemy and friendly situation; *Mission*, the task to be accomplished; *Tactical Missions for Subordinate Units*, the details of execution; *Administrative Matters*, covering administration and logistics; and *Signal Communications*, which includes location and communication of command posts.
3. The FO has three components: the *Field Order*, which is printed text; the *overlay*, which is the graphical outline of the operation; and the *reference map* that is the basis of the order.
4. A *warning order* is an abbreviated early form of the final FO that emphasizes the preparatory actions to be taken by all units while the final order is being written.
5. A *fragmentary order* is a short and concise order issued as an operation proceeds, usually changing or modifying the FO to meet unexpected problems or opportunities.
6. The military decision making process (MDMP) is a formal way of planning and issuing a combat order in the simplest and clearest way possible in the shortest time. It is just as useful in reenactor exercises as in training or combat.

Now take the self-assessment quiz for lesson 4.

This completes the course in operations. Gather your forces, make a plan, and go destroy something.