



A U.S. Army Soldier assigned to U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa engages pop-up targets with an M4 carbine during marksmanship training at Cao Malnisio Range in Pordenone, Italy, Jan. 26, 2021. (U.S. Army photo by Davide Dalla Massara)

The Operations Sergeant Major

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As the culture of the Army evolves, noncommissioned officers (NCOs) face many challenges that if not addressed, will be detrimental to future development of the NCO Corps. Those challenges come in the form of, “How we communicate, use technology, increase resilience, sustain tactical and technical proficiency, and inculcate ourselves and our Soldiers on ethics and values critical to maintaining an ‘Army Strong’ force.” (Department of the Army, 2020, p. vi). These challenges are overcome by recognizing areas of improvement and adapting to them. This article will at-

tempt to clarify the operations sergeant major’s role and highlight modern trends identified at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) under realistic combat training scenarios. It will also include a recommended course of action aimed at preparing the operations sergeant major to become a valued force multiplier for their unit.

The Operations Sergeant Major

Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 6-0.5: Command Post Organization and Operations defines the specific operations sergeant major as a senior NCO who over-

sees enlisted staff personnel and provides counsel to the operations officer. They are responsible for leading, guiding, and training Soldiers, as well as developing unit standard operating procedures, and enforcing standards and discipline (Department of the Army, 2017).

Principally, the operations sergeant major supervises the actions of the staff upon receipt of the executive officer's guidance and provides advice to the executive officer when warranted to drive staff operations towards the mission goal. According to doctrine (*ATP 6-0.5* and *Training Circular (TC) 7-22.7: The Noncommissioned Officer Guide*), the operations sergeant major reports to the operations officer; however, the operations sergeant major assists all staff elements, and should report to and provide counsel to the executive officer in all matters regarding the staff. The executive officer leads all staff elements, but the operations sergeant major drives all staff activities under the direction of the commander's intent (Department of the Army, 2017; 2020).

To be successful, the operations sergeant major must have a solid understanding of the following principles: NCO common core competencies, leadership, team building, and mission command. Combined and implemented, these concepts allow the operations sergeant major to gain an understanding of their staff's capabilities, efficiently manage personnel, and align talented staff NCOs by areas of expertise under a coordinating, special, or personal staff officer (Department of the Army, 2014).

According to retired Sgt. Maj. Castin in *The Battle Staff NCO Review*, during tactical operations, the operations sergeant major should focus on the tactical assault command post (TAC), the rear command post, and the tactical command post (TOC) (Castin, 2003). The operations sergeant major's role is to make these command nodes act as a dynamic group as well as manage guard rosters, create rest plans, and maintain discipline within and around the command nodes. They also work with other staff NCOs to manage logistical requirements, tactical employment, and security procedures (Department of the Army, 2017).

Current Trends

The following are recent operations sergeants major trends observed throughout multiple pre-deployment rotations at JRTC:

1. Don't always fully utilize mission command philosophy.
2. Don't synergize their staffs to their strengths.
3. Need to understand the duties and responsibilities of their staff NCOs during the military decision-making process (MDMP).

Mission Command

Operations sergeants major are often competent in several principles of mission command, to include mutual trust with their unit's staff NCOs, as well as understanding mission orders and risk mitigation. Yet



U.S. Army Soldiers with the 2nd Battalion, 4th Security Force Assistance Brigade, work in their Tactical Operations Center in preparation for a training rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, Louisiana, June 3, 2020. (U.S. Army photo by Chuck Cannon)

throughout several JRTC rotations, some often lack commander's intent, disciplined initiative, and shared understanding. This leads to a lack of resources for staff NCOs because there isn't a common understanding of current operations or mission objectives.

Staff Synergy

Often, operations sergeants major do not employ staff NCOs according to their strengths which ultimately hinders their ability to exercise disciplined initiative within their staff elements.

Understanding Staff Responsibilities

Operations sergeants major frequently lack full understanding of their staff's responsibilities and duties. This, coupled with the previously mentioned friction points, usually causes delays in managing staff processes.

Recommendations

The first recommendation to streamline the operations sergeant major position is for doctrine to further specify whom the operations sergeant major primarily advises to help define responsibilities. This prevents bias towards working solely with the operations section. Also, doctrine should specify that the operations sergeant major provide counsel and manage all staff element processes, not just operations.

A second recommendation is to create an Operations Sergeant Major Course (OSMC). Although the Sergeants Major Academy (SGM-A) focuses on creating agile and adaptive senior enlisted leaders, it does not fully prepare sergeants major in understanding an organization's operational approach at the tactical level. This limits the overall impact the operations sergeant major has on the organization to achieve the commander's desired end state (Department of the Army, 2019).

An OSMC could expand upon institutional knowledge gained at the SGM-A, giving tactical-level sergeants major a foundation principled in organizational success. Similar to the Company Commanders and First Sergeants Pre-Command Course, the OSMC would be a requirement prior to assuming the role of operations sergeant major. The course curriculum should include topics on: Army team building, staff synchronization and MDMP integration, command post activities, and organizing combat power. Other topics of consideration are an overview logistics, the

unit schools program, range control operations, and live-fire/situational training exercises.

Conclusion

Properly defining the position of the operations sergeant major is vital to the success of this role. By providing sergeants major with a thorough education on their responsibilities and expectations, the U.S. Army can create successful operations sergeants major who positively influence their organizations. This will build strong and cohesive combat ready units prepared for the future fight. ■

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