

# TACTICAL TERMINOLOGY

## Topic Area: Intelligence (SALUTE Reports)

By Sid Heal

All command posts rely heavily upon reports from field units for news about an incident. The larger the incident and the more spontaneous, the more important these field units are to provide firsthand information on the state of affairs. Sometimes called a “windshield survey,” the information is relayed to a central collection point for evaluation and analysis. A problem arises, however, when the information is received without an established format. Without some orderly arrangement, facts are jumbled together and the entire document must be read to glean pertinent details. The problem is particularly acute when the operation is extremely large or prolonged because the relevant is obscured by the volume.

A term familiar to many military personnel but almost unknown in law enforcement circles is the “SALUTE Report.” A SALUTE report is a field observation report that provides information about a specific occurrence in a standardized format. This allows an observer to go through a mental checklist when examining a situation and ensures that nothing of significance is omitted. It also makes it easier for an intelligence analyst to process a much greater amount of information, as well as make more accurate assessments and more precise forecasts.

Each of the six letters of the report represents a different factor in the observation, and they are arranged in the acronym SALUTE to make them easy to remember.

- *S* stands for *size*. Size refers to the extent or magnitude of the event. In a civil disorder it might refer to the number of members of a mob. In a fire it might describe the number of acres or structures involved.
- *A* identifies the particular *activity*. This is merely a description of the particular observation. It could be a fire, flood, looting or any combination.
- *L* pinpoints the *location*. The location should always be given as precisely as possible. When addresses are not available, mile markers or distance and direction from prominent terrain features can be used. If the incident is dynamic, the direction and approximate speed it is moving should also be provided. For example, a report of a protest march should identify the location where the situation was first observed and the direction and estimated speed the protesters are moving. Fires and floods are other examples of incidents that might require a direction.
- *U* refers to unit or *uniform*. This section describes who or what is involved and what they look like. For exam-

ple, in a civil disorder, a particular gang might be recognized; in a demonstration, it might be a particular union or activist group. If it is a thing, it prompts the observer to identify it. In a flood, it might describe the origin of the water, i.e., a broken dam, overflowing river, reservoir, etc.

- *T* defines the *time* and duration of the incident. This is the time that the observer first observes the event or, if it is concluded, the times that he observed them. Time is critical to an intelligence analyst to avoid making assessments on “stale” information as well as to avoid confusing a single incident that is described more than once by a number of observers.
- *E* identifies the *equipment* or weapons involved. An observer would note that demonstrators were carrying placards, banners or flags. In an incident that doesn’t involve people, this component may not be applicable but should be noted as such. No sections should be left blank. This avoids confusion as to whether something was not applicable or was just overlooked.

Two illustrations will serve as examples, one with people and one without. The first is a large-scale civil disorder. Riots are “people” events and every component of the SALUTE report is applicable. For example, toward the end of the 1992 riots in Los Angeles, gang members were organizing convoys and moving three and four to a car with 30 or more cars in a single group. This represented a formidable threat to the community and merited close attention. A law enforcement officer observing such a convoy might send a SALUTE report as follows:

- *Size:* 30 to 40 cars with three to four persons in each vehicle
- *Activity:* Gang convoy
- *Location:* Westbound on Florence Ave. from Hooper Ave. at approximately 35 mph
- *Unit/Uniform:* Believed to be Florencia Trece gang members. A number of gang members are wearing navy blue or black watch caps. All except two vehicles are passenger sedans. The remaining two are pickup trucks. The lead vehicle is an older model, primer gray Chevrolet two-door with four occupants.

*Continued on page 74.*

## TACTICAL TERMINOLOGY

Continued from page 73.

- *Time:* 1405 hours, May 1, 1992.  
Incident is ongoing as we speak
- *Equipment:* Numerous persons are openly drinking beer and several have displayed handguns

When received by an intelligence analyst, this information can be quickly integrated with reports from other observers, plotted on a map and placed in an intelligence log. Furthermore, if it becomes necessary to review a particular piece of information, the analyst can quickly identify the report and locate the necessary information. SALUTE reports are just as valuable when gathering information about natural disasters. A SALUTE report for a collapsed bridge during an earthquake might look like the following:

- *Size:* Four-lane freeway overpass
- *Activity:* Bridge collapse
- *Location:* Rt. 605 freeway overpass across the Rt. 210 freeway
- *Unit/Uniform:* The east side of the bridge has completely collapsed blocking both directions of the 210 freeway. The west side of the bridge is unusable and appears in imminent danger of falling.

- *Time:* 0502 hours, June 9, 1998
- *Equipment:* Cal Trans is at scene with two cranes and four pickup trucks.

On site supervisor is Randy Jones, cellular telephone 213-653-5782. He says the clean up will require 24 to 36 hours.

Like the previous report, this provides all the essential information regarding the observation and can be compiled with others for a more meaningful and effective analysis. Note that the observer included the site supervisor's name and telephone number. This allows an intelligence analyst the ability to follow up if more information is needed and allows the field unit to continue on to another assignment.

In large incidents, SALUTE reports may be categorized by the type of observation into separate intelligence logs. For example, road closures, damaged buildings, fires, broken water mains, gas leaks, etc. This greatly facilitates an intelligence analyst's task of compiling critical information and yields an abundance of useful "prepackaged" intelligence. The SALUTE report is easy to learn and is one of the most overlooked yet valuable tools a tactical commander can utilize to yield useful intelligence without an elaborate informational gathering mechanism. ■

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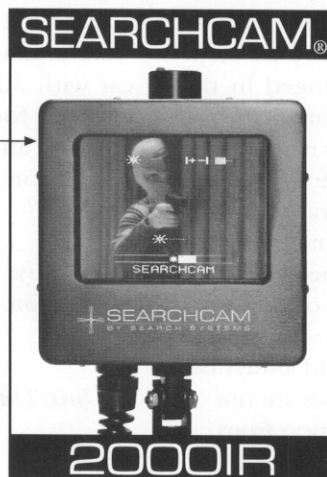


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