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## Care to Write Army Doctrine? With ID, Log On

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In July, in a sharp break from tradition, the Army began encouraging its personnel — from the privates to the generals — to go online and collaboratively rewrite seven of the field manuals that give instructions on all aspects of Army life.

The program uses the same software behind the online encyclopedia [Wikipedia](#) and could potentially lead to hundreds of Army guides being “wikified.” The goal, say the officers behind the effort, is to tap more experience and advice from battle-tested soldiers rather than relying on the specialists within the Army’s array of colleges and research centers who have traditionally written the manuals.

“For a couple hundred years, the Army has been writing doctrine in a particular way, and for a couple months, we have been doing it online in this wiki,” said Col. Charles J. Burnett, the director of the Army’s Battle Command Knowledge System. “The only ones who could write doctrine were the select few. Now, imagine the challenge in accepting that anybody can go on the wiki and make a change — that is a big challenge, culturally.”

In recent years, collaborative projects like the Firefox Internet browser or Wikipedia pages have flourished with the growth of the Internet, showing the power of thousands of contributors pulling together.

Not surprisingly, top-down, centralized institutions have resisted such tools, fearing the loss of control that comes with empowering anyone along the chain of command to contribute.

Yet the Army seems willing to accept some loss of control. Under the three-month pilot program, the current version of each guide can be edited by anyone around the world who has been issued the ID card that allows access to the Army Internet system. About 200 other highly practical field manuals that will be renamed Army Tactics, Techniques and Procedures, or A.T.T.P., will be candidates for wikification.

As is true with Wikipedia, those changes will appear immediately on the site, though there is a team assigned to each manual to review new edits. Unlike Wikipedia, however, there will be no anonymous contributors.

Many in the Army have been suspicious about the idea, questioning if each soldier — specialist or not — should have an equal right to create doctrine, Colonel Burnett said.

“We’ve gotten the whole gamut of responses from black to white,” he said, “ ‘The best thing since sliced bread’ to ‘the craziest idea I have ever heard.’ ”

The colonel said that he was hopeful that by reaching out to the 140,000 members of the Army’s online forums, he would be tapping the kind of people who would be comfortable collaborating on the Web.

“Our motto is, ‘If you ever thought what would I do if the Army let me write doctrine, now is your chance,’ ” he said.

The idea has support at the highest ranks. Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell, the commander of the Combined Arms Center at

Fort Leavenworth, Kan., wrote on the center's blog on July 1, that "by embracing technology, the Army can save money, break down barriers, streamline processes and build a bright future."

The seven guides in the pilot program frequently touch on areas that the rank-and-file soldier has had to master because of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, including topics like Desert Operations, Army Unmanned Aircraft Systems Operations and the movements of an infantry rifle platoon within a stryker brigade combat team.

For example, on July 7, a staff sergeant added his personal experience in Iraq to a guide for a stryker brigade combat team. Soldiers must understand, the original field manual says, "their vital role as collectors of combat information during the platoon intelligence activities."

The sergeant illustrated the idea with an incident in 2004 where a soldier met "an Iraqi family who was fluent in the Spanish language." An officer investigated and found "no ill will towards the United States or our allies, the goal of the family was to travel through Spanish-speaking nations into Mexico and then enter the United States."

But, the wiki contributor noted, there was a potential for terrorists trying to enter the country, concluding that this encounter demonstrated "the importance of passing along such intelligence to the proper channels."

The introduction of wikis is part of a revamping of the Army's field manual system, which currently has more than 500 different guides that cover crucial, so-called capstone doctrine — like interrogation or counterterrorism — as well as highly specialized guidance on, say, how to stay warm during cold-weather operations.

Under the new plan, 50 or so capstone guides will remain field manuals and will not be open to collaborative editing, said Clinton Ancker, a retired colonel who, as director of the Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate at Fort Leavenworth, is supervising the pilot program. More than 200 other former field guides are likely to be consolidated or even scrapped, he said.

Christopher R. Paparone, an associate professor in the Army Command and General Staff College's Department of Logistics and Resource Operations at Fort Lee, Va., who has been advising the Army to change its hierarchical thinking, wrote in an e-mail message that he was heartened by the Army's willingness to experiment.

"My view (not an official view) is that we have been much too rigid in our doctrine," he wrote. "By using wiki, we begin to challenge dogmatic thinking," adding that wikis made rank "immaterial."

Still, the reaction of the rank and file thus far has been tepid. A visit to the site hosting the seven wikified guides shows that there has been little editing over the first six weeks. In part, this slow acceptance reflects the different priorities between Army theorists and the working Army, according to Mr. Paparone, a retired colonel with a Ph.D. in public administration.

"The field Army is very busy and many who are out there 'operating' do not necessarily see much usefulness in doctrine anyway (except maybe as a start point to improvise from and something taught at our Army schools)," he wrote.

Mr. Ancker said he remained optimistic, however, in part because soldiers, even in an open-source world, still know how to take an order.

"One of the great advantages we have is that we are a disciplined force," he said. "We are hierarchical. When the boss says 'do this,' it tends to get done. Even those who don't like to write will add something."

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