

Department of the Army  
Pamphlet 600-67

Personnel—General

# Effective Writing for Army Leaders

Headquarters  
Department of the Army  
Washington, DC  
02 June 1986

**Unclassified**

# ***SUMMARY of CHANGE***

DA PAM 600-67

Effective Writing for Army Leaders

This pamphlet provides staff writing standards and guidelines to Army leaders, and outlines two editing tools and one organizational technique for use by leaders in achieving those standards and for obtaining them from their subordinates.

FOREWORD

12/23/85

"...an order that can be misunderstood will be misunderstood."

- Von Moltke -

Communicating accurate, timely instructions and information is as vital to today's Army as it was to armies of the 1800's. Consider this order from the Crimean War:

"Lord Raglan wishes the Cavalry to advance rapidly to the front -- follow the enemy and try to prevent the enemy carrying away the guns. Troop Horse Artillery may accompany. French Cavalry is on your left. Immediate." Lord Raglan yelled to the aide as he left, "Tell Lord Lucan that the Cavalry is to attack immediately."

Where was the cavalry to attack? While the fateful Charge of the Light Brigade is history, should we be guilty of such imprecise, obtuse communications today the result would be much the same. The major difference being that shortened time and distance factors will make our losses much more destructive to the Total Army.

We must be able to articulate our intentions so that soldiers and civilians two echelons removed will know the end we seek. One way to assure such clear and concise communication is by improving the quality of our writing. This pamphlet, Effective Writing for Army Leaders, can help if used correctly. It introduces a new, simplified writing style which establishes writing standards and guidelines, and outlines editing tools to help reinforce the standards for ourselves and our subordinates.

We must improve our communicating skills. An order that can be understood will be understood. When and if our soldiers are called upon to risk their lives in the accomplishment of their mission, there must be no mistaking exactly what we require of them.

*All of us, from Chief on down, need to improve our skills. Learning to write well is a lifelong endeavor.*

*John A. Wickham, Jr.*  
JOHN A. WICKHAM, JR.  
General, United States Army  
Chief of Staff

**RESERVED**

Personnel—General

Effective Writing for Army Leaders

**By Order of the Secretary of the Army:**

**JOHN A. WICKHAM, JR.**  
*General, United States Army  
Chief of Staff*

**Official:**

**R. L. DILWORTH**  
*Brigadier General, United States Army  
The Adjutant General*

**History.** The UPDATE printing publishes a new Department of the Army pamphlet.

**Summary.** This pamphlet outlines, for Army leaders, the standards of AR 600-70 and sets staff writing guidelines to achieve those standards.

**Applicability.** This pamphlet applies to the Active Army, Army National Guard, U.S. Army Reserve, and Department of the Army civilians.

**Proponent and exception authority.** Not applicable.

**Impact on new Manning System.** This pamphlet does not contain information that affects the New Manning System.

**Interim changes.** Interim changes to this pamphlet are not official unless they are authenticated by The Adjutant General. Users will destroy interim changes on their expiration dates unless sooner superseded or rescinded.

**Suggested Improvements.** The proponent agency of this pamphlet is the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Information Management. Users are invited to send comments and suggested improvements on DA

Form 2028 (Recommended Changes to Publications and Blank Forms) directly to Commander, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, ATTN: ATCG-W, Ft. Monroe, VA 23651-5000.

**Distribution.** Distribution of this issue has been made in accordance with DA Form 12-9A-R requirements for 600-series publications. The number of copies distributed to a given subscriber is the number of copies requested in Blocks 378, 379 and 380 of the subscriber's DA Form 12-9A-R. DA Pam 600-67 distribution is highest quantity under B, C, or D for Active Army, ARNG, and USAR. Future distribution of this publication will remain the same unless the Publications Account Officer adjusts the quantities using the enclosed subscription card.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1-1. Purpose

This pamphlet is a leader's manual. It –

- a. Provides accessible information on what kind of staff writing to demand and how to have it produced.
- b. Explains in detail what good Army writing is and how to establish uniform Army writing standards.
- c. Describes two quantifiable tools to reinforce better writing.
- d. Provides examples of the new standard for Army writing.

### 1-2. References

a. *Required publication.* AR 600-70, The Army Writing Program, is a required publication. (Cited in para 2-1d.)

b. *Related publication.* (A related publication is merely a source of additional information. The user does not have to read it to understand the pamphlet.) AR 340-15, Preparing and Managing Correspondence, is a related publication.

### 1-3. Why there is an Army Writing Program

a. Too much Army writing does not communicate well. It confuses rather than clarifies; it is wordy rather than concise; it hides the main idea rather than getting to the point.

b. We all recognize the particular style described in a above as "Army" writing. The Army has developed this style collectively. That means that, collectively, we can build a better style.

c. Information overload and the complexity of the modern Army demand a more effective style and a new standard for writing.

### 1-4. Defining the standard

a. According to AR 600-70, the standard for Army writing is writing you can understand in a single rapid reading, and is generally free of errors in grammar, mechanics, and usage.

b. Good Army writing is clear, concise, organized, and right to the point.

## Chapter 2 Leadership and Writing

### 2-1. Why we need a leader writing pamphlet

- a. Leaders lose too much time grappling with poor writing.
- b. Poor writing hinders decisions.
- c. Only leaders can make this new style happen.
- d. Paragraph 2e of AR 600-70 requires all commanders to uphold a common standard.

### 2-2. A different kind of writing pamphlet

a. This is a leader's manual, not a thick staff officer's guide. This pamphlet provides accessible information on what kind of writing to demand and how to get your staff to produce it.

b. Most significantly, the Army has set a standard for good writing and developed staff writing rules to reach that standard. You'll find those in this pamphlet as well.

### 2-3. Your role as an Army leader

This pamphlet has three primary sections and will assist you as an Army leader to –

- a. Issue the guidance to establish uniform, effective writing standards.
- b. Be a mentor to your subordinates using specific tools.
- c. Show the new standards using sets of examples.

## Chapter 3 Issuing the Guidance

### 3-1. Style Rules

Take these guidelines and publish them as your office writing rules to establish the new Army writing rules to establish the new Army writing standard. Require all people who write for you–

- a. Put the recommendation, conclusion, or reason for writing—the "bottom line"—in the first or second paragraph, not at the end.
- b. Use the active voice.
- c. Use short sentences (an average of 15 or fewer words).
- d. Use short words (three syllables or fewer). (See the clarity index in paragraph 4-3.)
- e. Write paragraphs that, with few exceptions, are no more than 1 inch deep.
- f. Use correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- g. Use "I," "you" and "we" as subjects of sentences instead of "this office," "this headquarters," "all individuals," and so forth, for most kinds of writing.

### 3-2. Two essential changes

These new writing guidelines mandate two critical changes that leaders must demand. The first change alters the structure of all Army writing; the second change transforms the style.

#### a. Structure—main idea first.

(1) Require all staff writing to begin with the main idea. The greatest weakness in ineffective writing is that it doesn't quickly transmit a focused message. Too much Army writing hides the main point. Insist, as business writers do, on the "bottom line" first. Have subordinates start with the information they would keep if they had to get rid of all the rest.

(2) Require specific packaging of all writing. Focusing first on the main point changes the overall construction of Army writing. This restructuring, called packaging, is the framework of the new writing style. Packaging is not format. Formatting begins after packaging to tailor the writing to a specific purpose. To package–

(a) Open with a short, clear purpose sentence.

(b) Put the recommendation, conclusion, or most important information (the main point) next. (Some writing combines the purpose and the main point.)

(c) Clearly separate each major section. Use paragraphs, headings, or section titles.

(d) Use a specific format if one is appropriate.

#### b. Style – the active voice.

(1) The major style change that makes Army writing clear, direct communication is using the active voice rather than passive voice. Many Army writers overuse the passive voice and create sentences that are indirect and unfocused, and that slow communication. The passive voice hides the doer of the action, blocking communication. Active example: Army beat Navy. Passive example: The Navy has been beaten by Army.

(2) The active voice is direct, natural, and forceful.

(3) The active voice does more than make sentences clearer – it shortens sentences. Eliminating the passive voice reduces a piece of writing by about 20 percent.

(4) The passive voice is actually very easy to recognize: it uses one of the eight forms of to be plus a verb usually ending in –en or –ed. Example: am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been plus the –en, –ed word (is requested, were eaten).

(5) When you see verb constructions like the examples in (4) above, you know the writing is passive. Although sometimes the passive is appropriate, most of the time it is not. Examples: The passive voice is abused in Army writing. When vagueness is wanted, the passive voice is selected by many writers. A direct style, on the other hand, is created by the active voice.

(6) When you see writing in the passive voice, have the writers change it to active voice. Tell your subordinates to put the subject first in sentences and they will become active writers. Example: Army writing abuses the passive voice. Army writers select the

passive voice when they want to be vague. The active voice, on the other hand, creates a direct style.

## Chapter 4 Being a mentor

### 4-1. General

Despite clear staff writing guidelines and focusing on only two essential changes, some of the writing you see won't meet the new standards. Most supervisors have little trouble identifying poor writing. Many, however, have problems knowing how to fix it or counsel someone else on how to fix it. Use the tools discussed in paragraphs 4-2 and 4-3 to give your subordinates specific, quantifiable feedback.

### 4-2. The quick-screen edit

This editing tool identifies major violations of the Army standard for writing. To use the quick-screen edit, simply do the following:

- a. use a highlighter, pencil or pen.
- b. In a single, rapid reading highlight, circle, or underline—
  - (1) The “bottom line,” the purpose of the piece of writing.
  - (2) Any forms of the verb to be used with a past participle ( a verb ending in “-en” or “-ed”). This identifies the passive voice.
  - (3) Any unnecessary long words or jargon.
  - (4) Spelling, punctuation, or grammar mistakes.
- c. Have your people revise the four targeted areas. In the revision—
  - (1) Move the “bottom line” to the beginning of the writing if it is not there already.
  - (2) Change only the other highlighted problems.
  - (3) Check the writing for packaging.
- d. See figure 4-1 for an example of highlighting, using the quick-screen edit. (The reverse type in fig 4-1 represents use of highlighting.) Figure 4-2 shows the revised example.
- e. This quick-screen edit is a quick, effective screen. It's quick because you only read it once. It's effective because you highlight specific errors. It's a screen because you highlight only those errors that are distracting.
- f. With this technique, you show subordinates exactly what to revise without requiring a complete rewrite.

### 4-3. The clarity index

Some writing problems do not lend themselves to a quick-screen edit. A second tool, the clarity index, pinpoints two other major reasons why writing that arrives on the desk is often confusing and difficult to read.

- a. Long words and long sentences make writing difficult to read. Such writing does not meet the new standards of Army writing. The clarity index provides a yardstick to measure how readable writing is. If you suspect that writing is not effective, this yardstick is helpful to quantify the problem.
- b. The clarity index is based on word and sentence length. Selecting a sample of 200 words or less, use the formula below. (For graphic representation of the formula, see fig 4-3.)
  - (1) Count the number of sentences.
  - (2) Count the number of words.
  - (3) Divide the number of words by the number of sentences to

get the average sentence length. (The target average is 15 words per sentence.

- (4) Count the number of words that have three syllables or more.
  - (5) Divide the number of long words by the total of words to determine the percentage of long words. (The target is 15 percent.)
  - (6) Add the average sentence length to the percentage of long words.
  - (7) The sum is the clarity index. (The target is 30.)
- c. If a writer eliminates long words and long sentences without changing meaning, writing becomes clearer. The writer is not producing simplistic papers or insulting the reader's intelligence. Instead, time-savings and understanding increase.
  - d. Use the clarity index once to quantify the density of a piece of writing for subordinates. Then have them periodically monitor their own writing. See figures 4-4 and 4-5 for examples of how to compute a clarity index.
    - e. Use the following Rules of thumb for the clarity index:
      - (1) Below 20, writing is too abrupt.
      - (2) Over 40, writing is difficult to understand.
      - (3) Aim for an index of 30.

## Chapter 5 Showing the New Standards

### 5-1. Establishing the guidelines

- a. The two essential changes – packaging and active writing – and the seven style techniques create a new standard for Army writing.
- b. The quick-screen edit and the clarity index help enforce the new standard.

### 5-2. Setting the examples

- a. The examples in figures 5-1 through 5-6 demonstrate the results of applying the leadership guidelines in this pamphlet to Army writing. Read and compare the examples. Do not accept writing like that labeled “poor writing.” Only accept writing like that labeled “good writing.” Use figures 5-1 through 5-6 as examples for your subordinates.
- b. The memorandum at figure 5-1 has a clarity index of 42. That's too high. The paper is far too long, is filled with jargon, the passive voice, and is not focused. Packaging in figure 5-2 brings the recommendation to the top and eliminates unnecessary verbiage. The example in figure 5-2 has a clarity index of 23.
- c. Much of figure 5-3 is error-riddled or Army jargon. It's an attempt to sound “serious” and military. Writing like this slows communication and sends the wrong message about the writer. Note the difference in figure 5-4.
- d. The other examples of standards in this pamphlet reflect the dramatic difference brevity makes to bring about more effective writing. Although the example at figure 5-5 is short, it has a more basic problem – packaging. Notice that figure 5-6 does not look markedly shorter, although it is. This document's legal nature does mean some things cannot be cut out. It's much improved, however, because the “bottom line” is up front and the paragraphs are short. Packaging speeds communication.

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A microcomputer can help this office speed up actions which is very important to getting all missions accomplished. By using the data base software, we can keep track of all training and not allow repetitive training. We can use the work processor to do our administrative actions and speed up our ability to do work. We need such an instrument at this time.

Figure 3-1. Example of writing without packaging

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- 
1. I request a microcomputer for this office.
  2. We need a microcomputer to:
    - a. Monitor training.
    - b. Increase the amount of work we can do.
    - c. Handle our administrative jobs.
- 

Figure 3-2. Example of writing with packaging

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1. The provisioning of government furniture in overseas quarters is permitted by the Army if it is more advanteous than shipping personal furniture. New cost comparison studies have been conducted by this headquarters, they show that this headquarters is entitled by these studies to buy furniture.

2. Requests must be prepared by this headquarters immediately to get the quarters furniture we now are authorized by the new purchasing data.

- provisioning--jargon
- is permitted--passive voice
- advanteous--misspelling and jargon
- have been conducted--passive voice
- headquarters, they--a comma cannot separate two sentences
- is entitled--passive voice
- must be prepared--passive voice
- are authorized--passive voice
- Requests ... data--the "bottom line"

Figure 4-1. Example of a quick-screen edit highlight

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1. We need to prepare requests immediately to get the furniture new purchasing data authorizes.
2. The Army permits buying overseas quarters furniture if it is cheaper than shipping personnel furniture. We have conducted new cost comparison studies that entitle us to buy furniture.

Figure 4-2. Example of revised writing

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- A. Number of sentences \_\_\_\_
- B. Number of words \_\_\_\_
- C. Number of long words \_\_\_\_

$$B \div A = \text{words/sentence} \quad \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

$$C \div B = \% \text{ long words} + \quad \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

$$\text{Clarity Index} = \quad \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

Figure 4-3. Computing clarity index

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Example: Summary of Action

1. Herewith is the Summary of action concerning the elimination case of the captioned officer. You will recall that when I briefed you on this case, I suggested that the Vice Chief be informed of my recommendation since he, as CG FORSCOM, initiated the Board of Inquiry and ultimately recommended approval of that Board's recommendation for elimination under other than honorable conditions. You left the matter of briefing the Vice Chief up to me and advised that after I had made up my mind in that regard you would make your decision in the case.

2. I asked for and had an interview with the Vice Chief. I explained that I wanted him to know about my recommendation to you in the case since he had initiated the Board of Inquiry and had ultimately recommended approval of that Board's recommendation for the elimination of LTC Jones with an under other than honorable conditions discharge. The Vice Chief was grateful for my courtesy but made no comment as to whether he was in agreement or nonconcurred with my recommendation.

- A. Number of sentences 6
- B. Number of words 176
- C. Number of long words 29

$$B \div A = \text{words/sentence } 29$$
$$C \div B = \% \text{ long words } + 16$$
$$\text{Clarity Index} = 45$$

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**Figure 4-4. Clarity index of original writing**

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Sample Solution: Summary of Action

Here is LTC Jone's case summary.

I did decide to meet with the Vice Chief. I felt that since General Smith, as CG FORSCOM, started the case and recommended discharging Jones, he ought to get the update.

The Vice Chief appreciated my visit but did not comment on my recommendations.

- Total words: 50
- Number of sentences: 4
- Words per sentence: 12
- Number of long words: 9
- Percentage of long words:  $6 \div 50 = 12\%$
- Clarity index:  $12 + 12 = 24$

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**Figure 4-5. Clarity index of revised writing.**

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MEMORANDUM THRU DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR OPERATIONS AND PLANS FOR VICE CHIEF OF STAFF, UNITED STATES ARMY

SUBJECT: Reserve Component Mobilization Exercises

1. The purpose of this memorandum is to reply to your not to the Director of the Army Staff which requested an evaluation be made to determine the feasibility of conducting mobilization exercises for NG and USAR units.
2. A feasibility study of such exercises has been initiated. Representatives from the NGB and OCAR have participated in a preliminary planning session, and FORSCOM has provided informal comments and suggestions.
3. It appears feasible to conduct an exercise of this nature within the current year; however, funding restraints, available planning time, and personnel and training disruptions will tend to limit the scope and participation. In line with these restraints, considerations applicable to such an exercise in the immediate future are:
  - a. Exercise should be conducted in conjunction with scheduled annual training (AT). Alert of participants should be made just prior to departure from home station for AT. This procedure should minimized individual disruptions while permitting the unit to exercise its mobilization plans and actions during a period normally allocated for preparation for AT. Further, this method would make use of funds already allotted for movement of unit.
  - b. Announcement of the exercise and its objective should be made in advance; however, selected participants should be alerted at a point in time which would allow realistic implementation and evaluation of their mobilization procedures. Early announcement of objectives, followed later by actual selection and alert of participants, would require all concerned to plan an prepare for the exercises even if not required to participate. Valuable planning and evaluation could be accomplished during this pre-exercise phase prior to the alert of participants.
  - c. In order to prohibit serious disruption of planned AT and pre-programmed testing schedules for RC units, close examination is required in the selection of participants. Units should be selected that have mobilization stations and equipment pools at the same location or in close proximity to each other. On the surface this appears a token approach; however, training time and funding limitations indicate that this is the most viable option within the near time frame.
  - d. Only active and semi-active installations previously programmed to support AT should be used. Funding restrictions and training considerations preclude opening or greatly expanding support facilities not already programmed for AT.
  - e. While total transportation requirements for units should be planned and determined during the pre-alert phase, costs and other restraints on movements may necessitate only partial or selected movement of equipment of the participating units.
  - f. Units to participate must be initially limited in number and size. These should include both USAR and NG units with priority of selection going to affiliated and early deploying (D+60) units. The selection of RC units to participate should be made by FORSCOM in coordination with NGB and OCAR.
4. Subject to further analysis, it appears feasible to conduct a mobilization exercise in conjunction with next year's AT. FORSCOM is receptive to the concept as outlined, but desires to examine the result of its Mobilization Evaluation Exercise which terminated 30 January, prior to the recommending or developing specific exercise objectives. Therefore, this is an interim reply.

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**Figure 5-1. Memorandum—Example of poor writing**

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MEMORANDUM THRU DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR OPERATIONS AND PLANS FOR VICE CHIEF OF STAFF, UNITED STATES ARMY

SUBJECT: Reserve Component Mobilization Exercises

1. Purpose. To answer this question: Can we conduct mobilization exercise for NG and USAR units this year?
2. Recommendation. Yes, we can, but with these constraints:
  - a. That FORSCOM sees the results of the last such exercise before planning begins.
  - b. That FORSCOM, together with NGB and OCAR, choose participating units.
  - c. That we use this year's training and testing money.
  - d. that the exercise is well-timed.
3. Discussion.
  - a. FORSCOM wants to help develop exercise objectives.
  - b. FORSCOM, NGB, and OCAR should—
    - (1) Select priority units first.
    - (2) Select units whose mobilization stations and equipment pools are close together.
    - (3) Not disrupt scheduled training and testing.
  - c. The budget does not include enough money to—
    - (1) Open new support facilities.
    - (2) Expand existing support facilities.
    - (3) Not disrupt scheduled training and testing.
  - d. Timing of the exercise should—
    - (1) Not change soldier's summer training periods
    - (2) Follow the actual mobilization time sequence.
    - (3) Permit as many units as possible to participate in the planning phase, even though they may not execute their plans.

**Figure 5-2. Memorandum—Example of good writing**

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HHB, 3/13th Field Artillery  
Schofield Barracks, HI 96857

MACC-D-XO

12 March 1986

SUBJECT: Request to be Assigned to Participate in JTX "Frostbite"

Commander  
3d Battalion  
13th Field Artillery  
Schofield Barracks, HI 96857

1. It has recently come to my attention that this Battalion stands in dire need of a volunteer to participate on a voluntary basis in an evaluative capacity on Joint Training Exercise "Frostbite" to be held in the State of Alaska on or about this summer time-frame.
2. I graduated fourth in a class of seventy-three from the U.S. Army Northern Warfare School on 17 August 1985 and was awarded the distinction of a distinguished graduate. I learned the latest in cold weather tactics while on patrol in the DMZ last winter which make me current in that area. In looking at the training forecast, it doesn't seem that I will be mission-essential during that training cycle. Much can be learned by seeing how other units operate in the boonies.
3. The S-3 indicated to me that anyone interested should submit a copy of their last physical. As you can see, I have no previous cold-weather injuries and, therefore, would perhaps be less susceptible to such injury.
4. It is my opinion that I am fully qualified to participate in this Joint Training Exercise at this point in time.

GERALD A. SANDERS  
1LT, FA  
FIST Chief

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**Figure 5-3. Military letter—Example of poor writing**

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HHB, 3/13th Field Artillery  
Schofield Barracks, HI 96857

MACC-D-XO

12 March 1986

SUBJECT: Request for JTX "Frostbite" Assignment

Commander  
3d Battalion  
13th Field Artillery  
Schofield Barracks, HI 96857

1. I request to represent the Battalion on JTX "Frostbite" in Alaska this summer.
2. I feel qualified for this assignment since I have some expertise in cold-weather operations. I was an evaluator during JTX "Team Spirit" in Korea last winter, and am a distinguished graduate of the Northern Warfare School.
3. I have attached a copy of my latest physical examination.

Encl

GERALD A. SANDERS  
2LT, FA  
FIST Chief

**Figure 5-4. Military letter—Example of good writing**

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DA form 4697 (Report of Survey), block 26:

I have examined all available evidence as shown in exhibits A to G and as indicated below have personally investigated the same and it is my belief that the article (s) listed hereon and/or on attached sheets, total cost \$433.50 was not damaged in an accidental manner. Something like this does not just happen; therefore, the soldier is responsible if negligent. As SP4 Farmer states in his statement (Exhibit B) the tailgate of the M113 was down when Private Thomas laid his M16 down on it to don his protective mask, (Exhibit A), because he thought he smelled CS. This act was in direct contravention of the Division, Brigade, Battalion, and Company Field SOP which states in part that "at no time will equipment be placed on the ramp of M113 personnel carriers" (Exhibit G). It also is expressly prohibited by the proper masking procedure which is to hold the rifle between the legs while masking (Exhibit F, "Soldier's Manual of Common Tasks," p. 37). When the squad leader (SSG Young) told the driver to raise the ramp (Exhibit C), he didn't know that Thomas had set his weapon down on the ramp. It was dark and nobody could see anything and Thomas was still adjusting his mask. Well, one thing led to another and the next thing you know Thomas' M16 is only good for shooting around corners. Such actions show negligence and make SP4 Farmer liable for restitution. (Exhibit D—statement from DS maintenance saying the M16 is irreparably damaged beyond repair).

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**Figure 5-5. DA Form 4697 (Report of Survey), block 29—example of poor writing**

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DA Form 4697 (Report of Survey), block 26:

I have investigated the evidence and find PVT John T. Thomas as negligent. PVT Thomas damaged his M16 by carelessly leaving it on an M113 ramp. Private Thomas admits that he laid his M16 on the tailgate of the M113 to put on his protective mask. By doing so, he violated two specific directives. Private Thomas neither followed proper masking procedure (Exhibit F, "Soldier's Manual of Common Tasks," p.37) nor obeyed his field SOP that "at not time will equipment be placed on the ramp of personnel carriers" (Exhibit G). His squad leader, SSG Young, attests (Exhibit C) that Private Thomas knew the SOP.

Direct support maintenance confirms that the M16 (total cost-\$433.40) is damaged beyond repair (Exhibit D).

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**Figure 5-6. DA Form 4697 (Report of Survey), block 26— Example of good writing**

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PIN 059937-000

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