

# MISSION COMMAND IN THE 21ST CENTURY

**Empowering to Win  
in a Complex World**

**Foreword by  
Lieutenant General  
Robert B. Brown**



**The Army Press**

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# **MISSION COMMAND IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

**Empowering to Win in a Complex World**

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**The Army Press  
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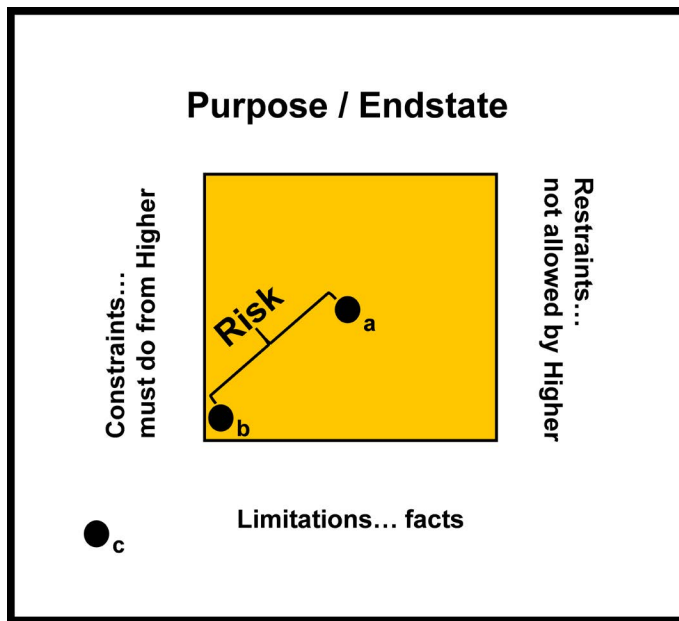
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## Foreword

For more than a decade, our leaders and Soldiers have consistently demonstrated mission command – a philosophy of leadership that decentralizes execution by providing clear intent – in various combat environments that demanded agile and adaptive leaders to make decisions in accordance with their commander’s intent. While acknowledged in doctrine as a core element in unified land operations, the acceptance and practice of mission command in garrison and training is less apparent. Mission command has served us well in the unforgiving crucible of ground combat and will be essential for winning in complex future environments. Since our task as leaders is to win, we must take every opportunity to reinforce mission command in garrison and training to maximize our personnel readiness for whatever the future may bring.

One of the six principles of mission command outlined in Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0 is “create shared understanding.” Our doctrine of mission command accurately states that “a defining challenge for commanders and staffs is creating shared understanding of their operational environment, their operation’s purpose, its problems, and approaches to solving them.” As we collectively move forward to address our problems and challenges, we need to prioritize mission command to empower our Army leaders. This volume of work uniquely accomplishes that task and represents a tremendous contribution toward unity of effort, collaboration, and dialogue, which is essential for both shared understanding and for continuing the legacy of mission command.

Whether myth or reality, our Army continues to endure accounts of mass centralization and an endless stream of guidance from well-intentioned leaders about what to do and how to accomplish an ever-expanding list of tasks. We can and must do better than this – with commanders providing a purpose and end state that enables staff and subordinate leaders to accomplish the mission without excessive limitations. Leaders should provide guidance and intent, then work to motivate and empower subordinate leaders to focus on priorities. While subordinates may not always deliver a perfect solution, good leaders build trust and underwrite the risk of our leaders and staff as they navigate constraints and restraints to achieve overall



objectives. Leaders need to allow subordinates the freedom to operate in the true spirit of mission command.

The diagram above represents a tool shared by Lieutenant General (Ret.) Jim Dubik to assist in visualizing this idea of mission command. The outer box denotes the purpose and end state, or the why, of a given

mission or action, along with the facts and limitations affecting the context of the issue to be addressed. As we have all experienced, these limitations include constraints that higher headquarters expects as well as restraints that headquarters will not allow. The gold-shaded box within the context symbolizes the commander's intent in how to achieve the purpose and end state. The center mark (a) is the commander's ideal solution set to address the dilemma, while the mark in the lower corner (b) is a typical staff or subordinate commander generated solution as variables and wargaming occur through the planning process. The gap between those two solutions represents risk that the commander assumes and underwrites as the mission moves forward. The mark outside the commander's intent (c) represents a staff or subordinate commander solution that does not meet the higher commander's intent, so the senior officer is obligated to coach, teach and mentor to drive a solution back into the realm of his intent. For those that repeatedly misinterpret or fail to achieve the commander's intent, the senior officer will hold those individuals accountable and continue to develop as required to instill understanding of intent and the ability to operate with mission orders.

Successful execution of mission command is possible if we demonstrate the "Seven Cs:" Character, Courage, Competence, Communication, Commitment, Compassion, and Confidence. All of these principles seem self-evident and none of them require explanation, but internalizing them, living them, and demonstrating them require vigilance and self-evaluation to enable mission command. As perfectly stated by Lieutenant General (Ret.) Dubik, "mission command demands trust among the leader teams that make up the chain of command, leaders who properly use initiative within the senior's intent and units that must be able to act, when the situation requires, not only in the absence of orders but also contrary to orders." This statement captures the essence of my own leadership philosophy and how, together, we will utilize mission command to ensure our Soldiers and our Army train – and fight when called upon.

Our ability to effectively execute mission command is essential to seizing the initiative and relentlessly exploiting emerging opportunities from the lowest to the highest echelon and from the strategic to the tactical level of war. Developing and maintaining this capability will ensure that no matter the challenge, no matter how complex the environment, or how dangerous the situation, our Soldiers fight and win. As our history demonstrates, we cannot compromise this capability without consequences, and we must never allow ourselves to fail our Soldiers through inaction. The ability to execute mission command and win begins in garrison and training.

We have always gained valuable insight from leaders' experience. This book harnesses that capability from examples of the power of mission command to enable agile and adaptive leaders in a variety of environments and missions, including ground combat. From quelling a riot in Bosnia, to the "Thunder Run" in Iraq, to several counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan, this anthology uses contemporary examples to highlight the effectiveness of mission command that can and should be emulated and sustained. There is also no shortage of doctrinal and practical discussion about mission command, which should reinforce the necessity of developing our leaders to understand and practice mission command on a daily basis.

When done correctly, mission command empowers people – our true advantage in a complex world. We must not only *understand* this, but *practice* it throughout our organizations to succeed today and in the future.



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## Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	iii
<b>Introduction</b>	
by Major Nathan K. Finney and Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan P. Klug.....	vii
<b>Section 1: Leadership in Mission Command</b>	
Chapter 1 – Mission Command in the 21st Century by Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Jack T. Judy.....	1
Chapter 2 – Enabling Mission Command Through Leader Presence by Colonel James K. Dunivan .....	7
<b>Section 2: Building Cohesive Teams and Shared Understanding</b>	
Chapter 3 – The Supremacy of Trust by First Lieutenant James L. Tollefson.....	13
Chapter 4 – Shared Understanding - Gaining Ground in a Complex World by Captain Daniel W. Krueger.....	19
Chapter 5 – Introducing Learning Agility to US Army Mission Command by Colonel Alan J. Boyer.....	25
Chapter 6 – Mission Command in Operations against DA’ISH: the Experience of the Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command - Iraq (1st Infantry Division) in 2014-15 by Lieutenant Colonel John C. Lemay .....	29
<b>Section 3: Clear Commander’s Intent, Disciplined Initiative, and Mission Orders</b>	
Chapter 7 – Mission Command In and Through Cyberspace: A Primer for Army Commanders by Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Victor J. Delacruz .....	35
Chapter 8 – Mission Command and Complexity on the Battlefield by Dr. Dan G. Cox .....	43
Chapter 9 – The Brčko Bridge Riot: Mission Command in the Midst of Ethnic Strife by Kendall D. Gott.....	49
Chapter 10 – Disciplined Initiative and the Commander’s Intent by Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Brian C. Leakey .....	57
Chapter 11 – FOB STRIKE Captain Thomas C. Evensen.....	63
Chapter 12 – The Battle for Observation Post Bari Alai by John J. McGrath.....	69
<b>Section 4: Risk</b>	
Chapter 13 – The Water Principle for Accepting Risk by Colonel Michael D. Higginbotham .....	77
<b>Section 5: Mission Command Across the Army</b>	
Chapter 14 – Mission Command in the Modern Army Garrison by Major Kristofer D. Fosmoe .....	83
Chapter 15 – Noncommissioned Officers and Mission Command by Sergeant Major Dennis A. Eger .....	89
Chapter 16 – Thunder Run in Baghdad, 2003 by Dr. Anthony E. Carlson.....	95
<b>About the Authors</b> .....	103





## Introduction

Major Nathan K. Finney  
Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan P. Klug

Warfare in the twenty-first century has placed immense pressure on US Army leaders at all levels. Operating on the streets of Baghdad and in eastern Afghanistan involved unfamiliar cultural contexts, complex problems, and resourceful enemies. To seize and retain the initiative in these settings, US Army senior leaders empowered their subordinate leaders, allowing the smallest teams to be agile and adaptable enough to win. While the Army has always fostered leaders to seize the initiative, senior Army leaders recognized that the experiences in this increasingly complex environment required more than just changing leadership approaches in theater – it required transitioning from command and control to mission command, which in turn required institutional change. The hard-won lessons learned from a decade of persistent conflict brought about a philosophical change throughout the Army to adopt mission command as the centerpiece of how the Army leads.

But what is mission command? First and foremost, mission command is a leadership philosophy. It is a mindset for leading a team in a way that facilitates followers to exercise initiative within their leader's intent. More specifically, it requires leaders to provide a vision of what they ultimately want to accomplish along with a minimum level of instruction that dictates the how. To be successful, this requires not only leadership, but followership as well. Subordinates must remain disciplined to achieve the leader's vision, which includes adhering to Army Values and standards and knowing when to seize unforeseen opportunities or react to unanticipated threats.

When assessing the Army's understanding of mission command today, there are several indicators that the Force as a whole does not fully understand the concept or practice it to its fullest extent. As a result, the Combined Arms Center produced this anthology of articles on mission command. Drawing on tangible examples of mission command in practice, the purpose of this book is to help explain the concept of mission command and demonstrate how this philosophy facilitates agility and adaptation. While the audience for this book is US Army leaders, this anthology is also intended to explain the Army's concept of mission command to audiences outside the military.

The Army's decision to embrace mission command was an institutional adaptation executed during a decade of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Counterinsurgency operations in these unfamiliar environments against resourceful insurgents emphasized the need for mission command. The velocity of human interaction had drastically increased and interacting with local populations and stakeholders while fighting local enemies required speed. Advances in communication technology, media proliferation, and the rapid diffusion of information added to these challenges. Centralized control of operations proved unable to keep pace with this increasing complexity and overwhelming information, so local leaders had to have the flexibility and freedom to act on their own. To be synchronized and effective, however, leaders still had to have an understanding of their commander's intent, as what may work in one neighborhood may actually undermine efforts for the entire city. In May 2012, the Army codified these lessons learned in new doctrine when it published Army Doctrine Publication 6-0, *Mission Command*, changing from command and control to mission command. The art of command is the creative and skillful exercise of authority through timely decision-making and leadership. The science of control is the regulation of forces and warfighting functions to accomplish the mission in accordance with the commander's intent. One of the key changes in the new doctrine was the inclusion of six principles of mission command: build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide a clear commander's intent, exercise disciplined initiative, use mission orders, and accept prudent risk. This new doctrine facilitated balancing the art of command with the science of control in our contemporary and future complex environments.

As seen in the strategic documents of the US government and its military services, the future will have similar demands as the recent past and even grow in complexity. The entire world is changing as technology, especially the speed and amount of information, continues at an amazing rate, fostering an increasingly urban and interconnected global populace. These strategic documents predict that our adversaries will continue to be highly resourced. They will be able to quickly change their strategy, the makeup of their forces, and the tactics their forces employ. Adding to our difficulty, adversaries will confront us with hybrid threats, using a combination of regular, irregular, terrorist, or criminal elements. Future foes will also enjoy rapid communications and operations. The Internet is essentially the command and control net for several terrorist networks, as it allows for rapid dissemination of information and orders. This is critical for both operations in the field and for fighting the battle of narratives. Insurgent and terrorist networks are willing to overtly lie, while we wait to ensure factual accuracy, adding to our challenge. The Army's approach to mission command allows us to more effectively combat these agile and technologically savvy adversaries.

Additionally, our leaders face the challenge of too much information. Leaders are bombarded by so much information that it will overwhelm a single leader. This large volume of information requires that commanders delegate decision-making and execution to the lowest appropriate level. When faced with today's level of complexity, leaders need to delegate to the point of discomfort. Overall, the Army needs to be proactive to successfully combat these future challenges.

Soldiers do amazing things when they understand the "why" and the larger picture, which mission command provides. Mission command also emphasizes that our people are our advantage, our key to achieving success. It is essential we remember that mission command involves all Soldiers, regardless of seniority. Everyone can empower their subordinates and peers. The best ideas tend to come from the edge, conceived by those who are closest to the problem. In this way, mission command accentuates American cultural advantages, as it uses the unique blend of American rugged individualism and creativity with a sense of Army teamwork.

To be proactive, the Army must develop its leaders and leverage its people. First, to retain what the Army learned in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is essential that we do a better job than we have in the recent past to develop the next generation of leaders to conduct mission command and to use those ideas generated on the ground, closest to the problem. The Army needs people who are adept at leading using mission command and following in an organization led through mission command. In addition to training that demands mission command for tomorrow's complex environments, effectively practicing mission command in combat requires being immersed in the mission command principles through education and while preparing for combat operations.

Mutual trust is the bedrock of any successful team in any endeavor. Trust takes time – whether in the military, business, academic, or any other pursuit – and trust must be earned. The story of Easy Company dramatized in The Home Box Office television series *Band of Brothers* provides a perfect small unit example. By leading the men of the company through demanding realistic training, as well as dealing with their toxic leader Captain Sobel, Lieutenant Dick Winters built trust and forged the company into a cohesive team before fighting in World War II. Similarly, in the world of sports, trust is the foundation of any winning team. Perhaps the most iconic basketball coach of our time, Mike "Coach K" Krzyzewski, illustrated this well when he said, "Throughout the season, I look into my players' eyes to gauge feelings, confidence levels, and to establish instant trust." Knowing his players and building trust clearly was essential to Coach K's two Olympic gold medals, five NCAA championships, and sixteen Final Four appearances. Leaders must trust in the abilities of their people and their people must trust in the competence and support of their leaders.

While trust has always been essential to building cohesive teams, there are several challenges to accomplishing this today. First, commanders must take advantage of every opportunity to build the team. One of the challenges is that units are often dispersed both in peace and war. While in garrison, portions of units

may be on different sections of the same post, different posts, or even different continents. This geographical separation is difficult, as building trust requires familiarity. Missed opportunities and insufficient time to bring together teams can also undermine building a solid team. Most missions today also require a mixture of civilian and military personnel, and a lack of understanding or miscommunication between these groups may result in suspicion and unhealthy internal division. The Army must strive to be inclusive, reaching out, leveraging, and trusting people beyond past norms, instead of being exclusive and not leveraging people who bring new and needed skills. From an Army unit perspective, it is naturally more difficult to build trust at the battalion and higher echelons. The Soldier in a platoon or company has a more concrete sense of belonging, as they live and fight in a small family. Being a member of a battalion is often more abstract, as companies are often on separate missions. It is therefore more difficult for leaders to build trust. Ultimately, a unit built on trust requires the right mindset of everyone involved. If leaders are not actively thinking about establishing trust and working to maintain trust, it will not get done.

The articles in this book that specifically address leadership through mission command and the principle of “build cohesive teams through mutual trust” include: “Mission Command in the 21st Century” by Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Jack Judy, “Enabling Mission Command through Leader Presence” by Colonel James Dunivan, and “The Supremacy of Trust” by First Lieutenant James Tollefson.

Once leaders have built a team through mutual trust, they must begin to develop shared understanding amongst that team. To do this, leaders must first establish a culture of collaboration and create a learning organization. Leading by example, soliciting and supporting other’s ideas, delegating tasks, and knowing when to get out of the way nurture collaboration. Effective two-way communication allows and facilitates the creation of shared understanding, which is not only an understanding of the current situation, but an understanding of the leader’s vision for the future. When given a mission, a commander and an experienced, cohesive team will create shared understanding of the purpose, problems, and approaches to solving those problems. A great example of this is Lieutenant Colonel Hal Moore and his 1-7 Cavalry as described in *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young*. Moore worked ceaselessly to build a team that shared his understanding of airmobile operations and the expected nature of combat in Vietnam, which undoubtedly saved lives in the Battle of the Ia Drang.

Today’s reality carries new challenges for creating shared understanding. First, it requires a more confident leader to stand in front of a group of any size and admit they do not have all the answers, as they need the entire team working towards a solution. Today’s challenges require a shift from the old mindset of “who needs to know?” focusing exclusively on passing information to the right people and organizations, to a mindset of “who could benefit from the information?” focusing more broadly on passing information to people and organizations who could potentially benefit from knowledge. Similar to building trust, another challenge is the growing distance between units and the greater dispersion between elements of those units. A third challenge is the rapid development of technology, which provides a staggering number of ways to communicate and inundates leaders and units with too much information. Finally, the future will require units to do more than just share information; they will have to create understanding and consensus while at the same time avoiding groupthink.

The articles in this volume that specifically address the principle of “create shared understanding” include: “Shared Understanding – Gaining Ground in a Complex World” by Captain Daniel Krueger, “Introducing Learning Agility to US Army Mission Command” by Colonel Al Boyer, and “Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command – Iraq (1st Infantry Division) Mission Command” by Lieutenant Colonel John Lemay.

Commander’s intent is a clear and concise expression of purpose and the desired end state for an operation or effort. It provides the “why” for the unit, its leaders, its people, and its constituent parts. A well-crafted commander’s intent conveys a vision and builds unity of effort. Providing this sounds easy; it is not. Crafting a commander’s intent is a difficult part of mission command to master – it is an art form

built by experience and reflection. An additional challenge is disseminating a clear commander's intent to all levels and ensuring it is universally understood, thus facilitating the seizure of the initiative. Most importantly, commander's intent is an essential component for commanders to drive the operations process of understand, visualize, describe, direct, lead, and assess. More specifically, commanders must understand the operational environment and the problem; visualize the desired end state and operational approach; describe the commander's visualization in time, space, purpose, and resources; direct forces and warfighting functions throughout preparation and execution; lead Soldiers and organizations through purpose, direction, and motivation; and assess progress through continuous monitoring and evaluation.

Why do militaries value seizing the initiative? Largely because of the chaos and unpredictability of combat. Military history is replete with examples of both opportunities seized that led to victory as well as opportunities missed ending in disaster. Additionally, there are many historical examples of local commanders seizing an opportunity that, while appearing to be beneficial to the unit at hand, actually do not fit with a commander's intent, and in many cases, end in disaster. In other words, mission command does not allow subordinates to act in whatever way they like; rather, mission command gives subordinates the freedom to act in the spirit of their mission and commander's intent, which is disciplined initiative.

One of the greatest and perhaps most famous examples of exercising disciplined initiative is embodied in *A Message to Garcia*. The popular pamphlet tells the story of Lieutenant Andrew Rowan's monumental effort to take a message from President William McKinley to Calixto Garcia, a Cuban rebel leader, with no real guidance beyond the end state of delivering the message and without asking for additional guidance or assistance. Instead, he clearly understood the commander's intent, thought his way through the problem, and exercised his own initiative to achieve his mission. Rowan travelled from the US to Jamaica and then into the Oriente Mountains and jungle of Cuba, where he was in constant danger of being captured and killed by Spanish forces, to find Garcia and complete his mission. Not only did Rowan deliver his message, but he used his initiative to begin cooperation between Garcia's forces and the United States, including bringing back invaluable information to Washington, D.C.

Contemporary challenges in exercising disciplined initiative are real and varied. First and foremost, leaders must know the capabilities and limitations of their subordinates very well. Some subordinates can have bigger "left and right limits," while others are less experienced and require more guidance. This detailed knowledge allows leaders to tailor their commander's intent based on the subordinate to whom they are providing it. Second is the pervasive challenge of accepting prudent risk, which is defined as deliberate exposure to potential injury or loss when the commander judges the outcome in terms of mission accomplishment as worth the cost. To accomplish the mission in today's complex world commanders must create opportunities, which in turn requires risk. Commanders must encourage subordinates to take action to create these opportunities and thereby seize the initiative. Part of this is locating responsibility: "Where does the buck stop?" In other words, leaders need to determine who accepts risk and who underwrites the risk. In order to exercise disciplined initiative, subordinates must trust that their leaders will take ownership of their mistakes, which includes not leaving them unsupported on the battlefield or in their career. A third challenge is that simple operations often breed micromanagement; however, while simple tasks can be accomplished through micromanagement, complex tasks cannot. Combat situations and thinking enemies, however, cannot be micromanaged. Disciplined initiative is essential to fighting in the crucible of modern ground combat, maintaining the tempo of operations we desire, and defeating resourceful enemies. Leaders may be able to succeed in peacetime micromanaging, but they and their units will fail under the strains of combat in a complex world. Finally, there is the growing challenge of staying within intent while avoiding "undisciplined" or even "indisciplined" initiative. Part of this is based on a misunderstanding of mission command. In some cases when senior leaders check on junior leaders, the junior leaders feel that the senior leaders do not trust them. Checking on subordinates is a leader's job, not an indicator of mistrust.

Finally, mission orders are directives that emphasize results to be obtained, not how to achieve them. They explain how the leader wants to achieve a decision in time and space – everything else is secondary.

Providing mission orders is deceptively difficult. First, the orders have to be tied to intent and express that intent. As General George S. Patton, Jr., said, “Don’t tell people how to do things, tell them what to do and let them surprise you with the results.” Orders must have balance between a clear vision and enough detail to execute operations without being overly prescriptive. As the 1939 doctrine on Army operations stated, “An order should not trespass on the province of a subordinate. It should contain everything that the subordinate must know to carry out [the] mission, but nothing more.” Leaders should only direct changes that are necessary to accomplish their or higher echelons’ concepts of operations.

This book includes six articles that address the three principles of “provide a clear commander’s intent,” “exercise disciplined initiative,” and “use mission orders.” These articles include “Cyberspace in Mission Command” by Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Victor Delacruz, “Mission Command and Complexity on the Battlefield” by Dr. Dan Cox, “Brčko Bridge Riot” by Mr. Kendall Gott, “Disciplined Initiative and the Commander’s Intent” by Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Brian Leakey, “FOB Strike” by Captain Thomas Evensen, and “Battle for OP Bari Alai” by Mr. John McGrath.

War has always been shrouded in uncertainty, which means any military effort inherently includes risk. Of course leaders would not expose their units to risk if they were not seeking an opportunity. The key to military leadership and mission command is “accepting prudent risk,” mission command’s sixth principle. Prudent risk involves understanding the problem – especially weighing the hazards, their likelihood, and their potential costs – and must be in consonance with the higher echelons commanders’ intent. Leaders then work to both minimize the chances of undesired events and to minimize the effects should those undesired effects occur. Ultimately, leaders must select ways that secure the desired opportunity whose risks are both deliberately considered and whose potential costs are commensurate with the advantages of achieving the desired opportunity.

Balancing risk with opportunity is arguably the most important planning task for a commander, and this task increases in difficulty as the complexity of the operational environment increases. When discussing risk in this setting, the question arises: “Where does the buck stop?” In other words, when using mission command, which leader is responsible when something goes wrong? Colonel Michael Higginbotham’s article, “The Water Principle for Accepting Risk” addresses the importance of accepting prudent risk, including the need for leaders to be clear about the risk they are accepting, taking ownership should failure occur, and thereby building trust with their people. Accepting risk also requires that leaders know their people and maintain a dialogue with them. Leaders must communicate priorities and empower their subordinates rather than micromanage risk. While it may be acceptable and even necessary to micromanage new or repetitive training tasks, leaders who micromanage complex tasks will fail. Their units will fall apart in the stress of combat.

The final three articles supplement the previous practical examples of the six mission command principles. These articles, including “Mission Command in the Modern Army Garrison” by Major Kristofer Fosmoe, “Noncommissioned Officers and Mission Command” by Sergeant Major Dennis Eger, and “Thunder Run in Baghdad” by Dr. Anthony Carlson, broadly address all the mission command principles as employed in specific settings rarely addressed in doctrine and scholarly articles. This includes the theory and practical application of mission command to Soldiers and institutions away from the battlefield. As the Army continues to inculcate mission command across an institution that is striving to become more agile and adaptive, the six principles must be employed in garrison and by more than just commanders. Mission command requires the involvement of all levels and leaders in the Army, including staff officers and non-commissioned officers.

One thing this book makes very clear is that effective mission command is not easy; its practice takes experience, energy, art, and skill. There is a fine balancing act between the art of command and the science of control. Properly balancing between the art and the science of mission command requires instinct, experience, and intimate knowledge of subordinates’ strengths and weaknesses. Leaders must consider the art of

command when developing cohesive teams and creating shared understanding, the science of control when providing mission orders, and both the art and science when developing a clear commander's intent and encouraging disciplined initiative. Additionally, leaders must balance the "what" and the "how" based on their judgment of the situation. Effective leadership today places a premium on influence rather than on authority, an emphasis that requires a learning environment in which everyone can learn from failure without fear of reprisal for an honest, professional effort. We cannot succeed without empowerment – mission command is the key. As an Army, we must continue to foster the advantages gained by leading through mission command, as well as leverage the inherent independence and can-do attitude in American culture. If we do this, we will help ensure that our forces can rise to any occasion. They will be ready to seize and retain the initiative in the unforgiving crucible of combat and win in an increasingly complex world.

# Chapter 1

## Mission Command in the 21st Century

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Jack T. Judy

The dawn of the 21st century casts a long shadow of innovation and change. Technology continues to advance and provide society with innovations only seen in science fiction of the 20th century. The cell phones people carry now are exponentially more capable than the computers that once took up an entire room. The world landscape has changed through the course of a myriad of conflicts, and space travel now looks beyond the moon, deep into space. To keep pace with the changing world, the United States Army continues to incorporate the modern, more sophisticated weaponry and combat enablers to maintain the standard as the world's best military. Despite all the advancements in technology and the changing landscape, the one element that remains constant is the human dimension. While the topics of the day and opinions will change and evolve through time, the human psyche remains relatively the same through the centuries. Harnessing the power of people is not an easy feat, and not something that comes naturally to some people. The military entrusts commanders to harness this power and lead forces to accomplish a common goal. To do this, the Army methodology is mission command, a set of fundamentals that help create an environment conducive to success. While mission command in the 21st century will have a lot of technology to support the commander, the principles have always been around; it requires skilled leadership to provide desired results. To achieve these results, leaders will need a combination of mission command fundamentals and leaders that emulate traits as outlined in the Leadership Requirements Model.

While mission command is a relatively new tenet in Army doctrine, the underlying principles have been around for centuries. The ability to influence a group of people to accomplish a common goal takes stolid leadership and guidance. Advancements in technology provide a new set of tools and an increased efficiency for a commander, yet the things that motivate and influence people remain the same, since people have not changed (physiologically speaking). Abraham Maslow published his theory of human motivation in 1943, introducing his hierarchy of needs.<sup>1</sup> Maslow determined people work to fill basic needs first before progressing to a higher need. He discusses how people progress through the six needs (physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, self-actualization) with a desire to fulfil the basic needs first, and progress to the next, until reaching self-actualization. Incorporating the physical origin for motivation being the release of dopamine and the fact that the human body functions have not changed, it appears quite evident that what motivates people is the same.<sup>2</sup> From the context of physiology nothing is changed, and an examination of the root of mission command concepts reveal they are not new.

A generic view of the principles of mission command demonstrates a need to cohere a group, garner consensus, provide direction, and convey the plan so the group can act. This holds true for any team effort. Take football as an example. The coach takes a group and assigns them positions. The team practices to increase individual abilities and the ability to work together. The more the team plays together, the more the players trust each other. There are rules to provide the framework of fair play, and playbooks to provide the plan to execute. The quarterback communicates the plan to the team in the huddle. All the players must exercise discipline and perform their task in order for the plan to be successful. The plays are designed to deceive the opponent, so there is some risk (inherent to execution) that the deception will not work, it will be too risky, that the quarterback will call an audible; but this is an acceptable risk, and they execute as planned. This is the basic cycle for all the teams in the league, yet at the end of the year, season records vary widely reflecting winners and losers. While all the teams run this basic cycle, the difference comes from the players.

Exceptional players that exhibit strong attributes and are competent at their positions provide the team an edge over the opponent. Players spend countless hours working out to achieve a superior level of fitness to provide a competitive edge with peak strength and endurance. Good players demonstrate the ability to think on their feet and make sound, quick decisions and take the field with more desire to win than

their opponent. Competence is a critical element in success, and moves beyond just being able to play the position, but to getting results. Experienced players teach, coach, and mentor the less experienced to help develop their abilities. Leadership is more than being the one throwing the football. It requires being able to focus the team, motivate performance, and accomplish the common goal. Nevertheless, the key element in the successful leader is trust. If the leader does not have the players' trust, the leader will be ineffective.

Looking back in history, one can see how some of these elements affect organizational behaviors and outcomes. On a strategic level, rulers like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Benito Mussolini were able to influence their organizations, and while they were able to achieve success for a time, in the end they failed. From a mission command and leadership perspective, they did not embrace many of the elements of either. They ruled by fear instead of instilling trust in their subordinates, had questionable character, did not develop subordinates, and did not instill a lot of confidence among the majority of their followers. Conversely, leaders like Generals Omar Bradley, Dwight Eisenhower, and Douglas MacArthur are famous for their ability to lead. One common factor was their ability to leverage their human capital and develop subordinates, build teams, and inspire trust and confidence from subordinates. History shows who had the winning record and who had the losing record. On a different level, there is a reason why football coaches and quarterbacks receive such handsome salaries: good leadership is crucial to success. Those who do not perform do not last long and end up traded or fired. A cursory look at the human psyche, organizational performance, and the ability to leverage human capital demonstrates that the essence of building a high-performing organization to attain a common goal has been around for a long time. The Army has now codified the principles of mission command, and combined with leadership qualities, will help set the conditions for success in the future.

The 21st Century brings a vast selection of technology to support commanders and staffs, and increase the efficiency of formations; however, technology is not a substitute for leadership. Commanders cannot build organizational cohesion and mutual trust from a computer or demonstrate the attributes and competencies to influence confidence. Leaders must build success the old-fashioned way – in person.

The principles of mission command are a guide to build and influence an organization to achieve that common goal over time. The principles of mission command are: build cohesive teams through mutual trust; create shared understanding; provide a clear commander's intent; exercise disciplined initiative; use mission orders; and accept prudent risk. Leaders cannot just execute these principles at that crucial time when the need is greatest, they need to already have a solid foundation built within the organization.

Commanders must apply several of the principles, like team building, understanding, and initiative, when forming the organization; and these areas will take personal attention. Building a cohesive team through mutual trust is the foundation to this pyramid. Without trust, the organization will not excel. The most important element of this principle is "mutuality." The commander must trust subordinates as much as subordinates trust the commander. This is a relationship that takes time to build and nurture, and one that technology cannot leverage. In fact, the lack of presence will have an opposite affect and cause the cohesion to fester. Building on that foundation of team-building is creating a shared understanding among the group. Members learn their jobs along with how they interrelate with the rest of the team. They begin to think alike. Once members trust, and know they have the trust of, the commander and understand the intricate functioning of the team, disciplined initiative is a result of the team-building effort. Team members will have the expertise to apply critical thinking and solve problems without the need of any direction or oversight. As we examine these principles, we will see that a commander must hone these elements early in the group formation, or perhaps upon taking command. These require practice and time to refine, so if a commander is not able to establish these basic elements, leveraging the other principles of commander may be difficult.

Once a commander creates that solid foundation of expertise within the unit, the remaining principles enable the commander to influence action by communicating the organizational goal, guidance for



execution, and parameters in which to remain. This allows the commander to command while the staff executes. Providing a clear commander's intent will articulate the desired end state (goal) as the mission orders provide direction and guidance to the execution of the effort, and the parameters will establish acceptable risk. These principles are more situationally dependent; the goal, execution, and risk will depend on the problem. At the organizational level, applying the principles of mission command will result in a high performing operation; however, some of the real strength resides within the human capital within.

To build on the strengths of the mission command principles, increasing the strength of the individuals within will provide a synergistic affect making the organization better. The catalyst is creating strong leaders that possess the attributes and competencies to lead. The attributes will define what the leader is while the competencies will define what the leader does.<sup>3</sup> These are two key characteristics that provide the foundation of trust.

A leader's attributes help define them as a person; their values, the way they carry themselves, and ability to think are some crucial indicators of the whole person. With this, we need to keep in mind that this is not specific to the commander, but to the team as well. Looking at one's character can reveal a lot about the person. Individuals who uphold the values of the organization, do what is right regardless of personal consequences, and demonstrate a true concern for subordinates and peers alike quickly gain the respect of others and their willingness to follow. An individual's presence is an overt indicator. First impressions are important, and someone who displays a professional appearance and confidence will garner a high opinion from others. To complete the package, having the intellect to think quickly and the sound judgement to make good decisions is the glue to bond the elements together. Conversely, an individual of poor moral character, who displays a shoddy appearance and toxic attitude, and lacks the intellect to crucially think and solve issues, will be an obvious detriment to any organization and not gain any trust. The other half of this formula is competence.

The core of a credible leader is competence, and with that accompanies confidence from subordinates. People just do not follow incompetent people; not intentionally. That completely defeats the purpose of a group working to achieve a common goal. Competence starts with self-development and honing skills necessary for the profession. Taking this a step further, good leadership includes developing others within the organization. Across the spectrum, a competent leader creates a competent organization with the end result of being able to achieve results. One can apply the principles of command and possess impeccable attributes, but without a competent team, success will be fleeting.

The aggregation of the Army's leadership requirements and the fundamentals of mission command are the foundation for mission command in the 21st century because of the decentralized nature of an insurgent foe. The Army Strategic Planning Guidance characterizes the future operational environment as one without any clear primary threat. For the foreseeable future, the expectation is mostly unconventional warfare, characterized by a list of adversaries that include non-state actors, terrorists, and criminals as part of a laundry list foes.<sup>4</sup> To combat these threats, it will take small, decentralized unit action, many times in urban areas. While the Army defines mission command as "the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders," the principles must resonate through all the leaders.<sup>5</sup> In Afghanistan, many units established forward operating bases and combat outposts, often commanded by company grade officers far away from their battalion-level leaders. To be successful, these leaders will need to demonstrate the competence and character to gain their subordinates' trust, but also be able to translate the fundamentals of mission command and apply them at their levels.

As the Army transforms mission command in the 21st century, it will be the operating environment that will shape how commanders apply the fundamentals, not new technologies. Moving from the Cold War approach of protecting the Fulda Gap from an onslaught of Russian tanks to an insurgent force, the battlefield geometry has changed from one of symmetry (friend on one side, enemy on the other) to an asymmetric area with small enclaves of forces surrounded by an unknown element. Commanders no longer

array their forces sequentially forward in depth, but now present an archipelago appearance scattered throughout the area of operations, significantly reducing the direct influence a commander may provide to forward elements. Advancements in technology will definitely provide the commander better situational awareness; however, success or failure will depend on the leader and their soldiers. Operating away from the parent unit, these smaller elements carry the same burdens the parent units do, and have to make the decisions to accomplish the mission. With this burden comes the requirement to be able to influence the group to accomplish the common goal. Sheer chaos can quickly interrupt tedium in an instant, and that becomes the looking glass into effective mission command.

Examining one of the more publicly known battles, the battle of Ganjgal, will help illustrate how the fundamentals mission command and leadership are resident, along with the most crucial element needed to carry out the concepts, the Soldier. The battle of Ganjgal occurred on 8 September 2009 during a routine mission with United States embedded advisors and Afghan soldiers and police heading to visit the elders in the Ganjgal Valley. The notoriety of this battle was not due to any significant milestone to end the war, but came from the heroism of soldiers like Captain William D. Swenson (awarded the Medal of Honor) and the inaction of others. As the unit of one hundred-plus approached the village, they were ambushed by a large, well-trained group of insurgents. The ambush caught many soldiers in the open, to include several American Soldiers. The Afghan forces quickly dispersed for cover and returned fire, and their command and control began to break down.<sup>6</sup> With the enemy gaining the initiative, Swenson repeatedly called for artillery support only to be denied because of concerns about dropping rounds too close to civilians. Knowing a small group of Marines was cut off from the main body, Swenson gathered a small group of soldiers and repeatedly, in withering fire, returned to the kill zone to evacuate casualties. While in the kill zone treating a casualty, and signaled by an insurgent demanding surrender, Swenson's response was to throw a hand grenade at the insurgent; he then continued to treat and evacuate the casualty. This tenacious act also served as a catalyst for the Afghan police and army to rally and push back the insurgents, gaining time to assist in the evacuation of the patient. Throughout the day, Swenson, accompanied by a small group of soldiers, made several more forays into harm's way to recover fallen comrades before being able to disengage. In the end, the success lay with the soldier on the ground and not in available technology.<sup>7</sup>

The events of Ganjgal highlight several of the principles of mission command and how it influenced the outcome. This helps highlight the importance of building cohesive teams and trust. It was quite evident that Swenson's core group of advisors were clearly a high-performing team with absolute trust in each other. Comparatively, the nascent Afghan military and police dispersed to return fire. At the far end of the spectrum is the other unit that denied fire support for the troops in contact, obviously having no team-building or trust. Of course, this is one principle that takes time to establish and not one that solidifies in the course of minutes. The battle also highlights the need for the ability to create a shared understanding. Swenson was able to create enough of an understanding among a small group of soldiers to be able to successfully make several trips to evacuate soldiers from the kill zone.

Sound leadership attributes and competencies (as described in the Army Leadership Requirements Model) are combat enablers that complete mission command. The battle of Ganjgal illustrates the effects of strong leaders with the attributes that created trust from subordinates, and the competence to salvage a bad situation. Swenson sums this all up.

With the Afghans, one cannot overtly lead – they are their own military, independently run by their own leadership. But you can also influence them with advice and your presence. Show your professionalism to them, then you exhibit leadership when they don't even know it's there. They'll follow your example, your character, so was I leading anyone? No. Was I offering an example for them to follow? Yes.<sup>8</sup>

As the dust settles, it is the combination of the application of several areas of leadership doctrine and the Soldier that are the future of mission command.

Mission command in the 21st century will certainly enjoy a vast array of technologies to support commanders throughout the years; however, the Soldier remains the focal point for success. The basic human psyche for motivation remains the same as it has for centuries. The application of the principles of mission command beyond the level of commanders combined with confident, capable leadership abilities always have and always will be the key to future success. There is a difference between that football team that finishes the season undefeated and the teams with losing records.

## Notes

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## Chapter 2

### Enabling Mission Command Through Leader Presence

Colonel James K. Dunivan

In a private letter to Ulysses S. Grant in 1864, William T. Sherman congratulated his mentor on his promotion to lieutenant general and eloquently praised his leadership on the battlefield in meriting such an honor. “I knew wherever I was that you thought of me,” wrote Sherman, “and if I ever got in a tight place you would come – if alive.”<sup>1</sup> This simple but genuine statement reflects the standard of mutual trust and shared understanding between commanders and subordinates that is required on the modern battlefield. Establishing this degree of thinking and trust happens only through consistent dialogue and presence, which empowers both leaders and units, and ultimately enables mission command.

While this seems self-evident in theory, it has not always been practiced in contemporary conflict. A 1970s book entitled *Crisis in Command* highlighted a general failure of leadership during the Vietnam War. One indictment was a lack of leadership presence on the ground, where officers “simply did not share the burden of sacrifice that was expected of them” in combat.<sup>2</sup> The authors of the book contrast this behavior with the comment of a British noncommissioned officer from another war who, upon being asked where his officers were, replied that “when it comes time to die they will be with us.”<sup>3</sup> Within the US Army experience in Vietnam, there are exceptions of course, as pointed out by retired Lieutenant General Hal Moore in his book *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young*:

Some commanders used a helicopter as their personal mount. I never believed in that. You had to get on the ground with your troops to see and hear what was happening. You have to soak up first-hand information for your instincts to operate accurately. Besides, it’s too easy to be crisp, cool and detached at 1,500 feet; too easy to demand the impossible of your troops; too easy to make mistakes that are fatal only to those souls far below in the mud, the blood, and the confusion.<sup>4</sup>

In today’s doctrine of mission command, leadership presence on the ground is essential. While this can be attributed to timeless principles of leadership, such as set the example, it is also a vital component of the doctrinal art of command (as opposed to the science of control). ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, states it clearly and definitively by recognizing that “Soldiers expect to see the chain of command accomplish the mission while taking care of their welfare and sharing hardships and danger.”<sup>5</sup> This duty can only be demonstrated by being among Soldiers, on the ground, experiencing the crucible of ground combat.

With advances in technology it is easy to forget the value of physical presence on the ground. Too often we tend to view mission command only as a system, electronic components of communications networks and architecture, at the expense of understanding and practicing the philosophy of mission command. There is a symbiotic relationship between both. In my own command philosophy published shortly after taking the reins of 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment in September 2010, I discussed our need for communication expertise with voice and data systems to enable reporting and maneuver within the context of our operational environment; but I also emphasized that every leader will establish trust, provide mentorship and foster initiative among their subordinates.

Privileged to have a chain of command that understood and practiced mission command, these ideas were nested all the way up through our Division Commander’s leadership philosophy as well. Our brigade commander set conditions for our ability to build upon this foundation of mission command and its principals by first empowering us to train the squadron for full spectrum operations and then by making the decision early to task organize for our rotation to the National Training Center (NTC) and for deployment to Afghanistan. Once in theater, our designation as the battle space owner for Zabul province was essential for maintaining unity of effort and keeping everyone focused on achieving the commander’s intent. Having been given that necessary backing and support, it was up to myself and a cast of exceptional troop and

company commanders to maintain that trust through disciplined initiative, mutual trust, and shared understanding as we carried out wide-area security operations on a daily basis in Afghanistan.

With the obstacles and challenges that accompanied those operations in Afghanistan, this was not an easy task. Our team worked hard to proliferate a leadership style to accomplish these mission command imperatives through transparency and presence. It is good practice to keep Soldiers informed so they understand the “bigger picture” of what you are trying to accomplish. This dialogue and shared understanding also provides you the essential insights and “pulse” to know what is going on within the unit. As a leader this is imperative – one must know and understand what the Soldiers are experiencing, first hand, which requires leading from the front and being there alongside them as mission dictates.

In modern combat theaters such as Operation Enduring Freedom, where there is a propensity for multiple simultaneous missions, it is imperative to identify the decisive point or the main effort of the operation at hand in order to weight that effort with leadership presence. Even with all the combat enablers available on the modern battlefield, often resource constraints or rules of engagement limit their utility. Commander or leader presence is the one true combat multiplier that can be allocated and controlled at the lowest level. We used to be really good at this as an Army, where we identified and published key leader locations in operations orders in accordance with a standard operating procedure. The commander would typically weight the main effort with his or her presence, while the operations officer would accompany a supporting effort or operation. The executive officer was a standard fixture within the tactical operations center who maintained overall situational awareness for the commander and managed enablers and reporting as required, while the command sergeant major was often in the field trains or conducting movement in support of logistics or casualty evacuation. The leadership understood and exercised their roles for the good of the unit in accomplishing its mission set.

As those mission sets evolved, especially over the past decade in a counterinsurgency environment, we largely got away from many of those practices. Our doctrine still advocates for commanders to “use their presence to lead their forces effectively” while they “position themselves where they can command effectively without losing the ability to respond to changing situations.”<sup>6</sup> However, this can be challenged and influenced by limitations of movement assets and tactical directives that prioritize force protection and constrain maneuver flexibility. Our default reaction was to develop tactical command post (TAC) concepts where most of the command group (commander, command sergeant major and operations officer) would maneuver together to go to the same place. This having been my own experience as an operations officer in Iraq, I followed the same paradigm as a commander by maneuvering our three-Stryker TAC during home-station training and early in our rotation at the NTC. It was during our NTC rotation, when we became frustrated by limitations on our ability to have commander and leadership presence across a geographically dispersed area of operations, that we realized a more optimal solution was needed. We added a “mobile command group” (MCG) that could augment the TAC to provide additional flexibility for leadership presence and mission command to better enable what we were trying to achieve and allow mission success.

It is noteworthy that maneuvering mission command nodes is not to be confused with the much-utilized concept of battlefield circulation. Battlefield circulation used to be a term to describe a tactical task, usually performed by military police, to ensure freedom of movement on the battlefield. Senior leaders today tend to conduct battlefield circulation, usually from their headquarters location to another secure forward operating base, to receive a briefing in a subordinate headquarters or to conduct a key leader engagement with one of our foreign national security or governance partners. The more senior the leader, the more semblance to a rehearsed production it becomes, although if leveraged properly one can use the occasion to recognize Soldiers in promotions, reenlistments, or award ceremonies. To be fair, senior commanders have to understand their operational environment, and subordinate leaders and staff can provide a much more accurate overview as to what is going on in their own smaller piece of the fight, which may benefit higher commanders in making their own decisions and allocating resources.

Beyond that benefit, unfortunately, battlefield circulation tends to focus more on meeting schedules or some form of rotational equity to visit units rather than deliberate maneuver to friction points or to the “sound of the guns” that could be positively influenced by a commander’s presence and involvement on the ground. Need close combat air or indirect fire support in an operational environment with limiting and restrictive rules of engagement? Who is more suited to make that happen than a commander on site? Recent contemporary conflict is predominantly comprised of decentralized operations at the small unit level, but leader presence must be maintained. While it is within our doctrine to see first and understand first so we can act and finish decisively, this is typically only effective to the limit that one can see and understand over a Tandberg video teleconference, phone call, or via email. We can and must do better in embracing the spirit of mission command to empower subordinates and let them execute the fight – while exercising leadership responsibility and the art of command, which is irreplaceable despite all of our innovations in science and technology.

ADP 6-0 defines the art of command as “the creative and skillful exercise of authority through timely decision making and leadership.”<sup>7</sup> One cannot overstate the value of leadership provided by a commander in a combat environment, which may be crucial to the success of the mission. The physical presence of a leader can be important to the morale and motivation of Soldiers, especially during intense times of sacrifice or difficulty. This effect can be planned for and achieved by locating oneself, or other critical mission command nodes, at the place and time needed to maintain momentum in the operation. As a squadron commander I was able to exercise this privilege on numerous occasions, both successfully and on occasions when I could have done better.

One of the most vivid examples of mission command in my experience as a commander occurred over a ninety-six hour period of multiple operations within the squadron operational environment in Afghanistan. While planning simultaneous missions is never optimal, it is often a product of empowering our Afghan Security Partners to take ownership of planning and execution of operations while supporting them in a manner consistent with their desires and your commander’s intent. In this particular case, the Afghan brigade and the squadron partnered to execute an area clearance operation, a route reconnaissance and clearance, and a ground assault convoy to move engineer assets to complete the construction of an Afghan combat outpost – all geographically dispersed over one hundred kilometers apart.

All of these operations were critical, so we allocated mission command nodes in accordance with familiarity with our Partners, our knowledge of the terrain, and assessment of tactical risk. The squadron operations officer, along with a security element and support from a recon platoon, accompanied an Afghan Army *kandak* (the Afghan equivalent of a battalion) during clearance operations in the Tolkum Valley, while I maneuvered with our recon and engineer elements with an Afghan *kandak* to conduct route reconnaissance, clearance, and improvement to Deh Chopan district. Since this route had not been used by Coalition Forces for more than four years, I felt my presence was warranted on the operation. An infantry company, along with construction engineer assets, was poised to maneuver, finalize construction and occupy a combat outpost in Shamulzai with another Afghan *kandak*. As it turned out, the operations officer ended up in one of the most lethal fights experienced by the squadron, and his presence was critical to motivating and enabling our Partners in the Tolkum Valley. The mission to Deh Chopan, however, would not have been completed without my presence on the ground, only because I was able to make decisions and assume risk that was vital to getting a small force to the objective with our Afghan counterparts. On the third evening, after finally reaching Deh Chopan, a security element and I were picked up by helicopter and inserted near the Tolkum Valley to link up with the operations officer to examine the situation on the ground there, which by then was under coalition control after enemy culmination and withdrawal. Prior to that airlift, however, I was able to communicate with the squadron executive officer in the operations center to delay the movement of the infantry company mission until we got the other two fights under control. Throughout all these operations, enabled by leader presence and shared understanding from constant communications, our use of mission command allowed the squadron and our Afghan Partners to execute our wide area

security tasks with success. These types of operations also firmly established a relationship, built upon mutual trust, with our Afghan security counterparts.

While building cohesive teams through mutual trust is essential to the art of command, it can be challenging to reorganize a team and validate the training and proficiency of outside enablers while conducting daily operations in theater. I had to address this during the integration of advisor teams into our province in Afghanistan while assisting our Afghan Partners in understanding the differences between “partnered” operations and “advised” operations. We had been in country over six months and had established solid relationships with our Afghan Security Partners through many shared experiences on the ground. We then had advisor teams assigned into our operational environment, so we had to quickly and effectively bring them into the unit and make them one of us. Welcoming them into the squadron was easy, but I struggled with validation of their training and how to comfortably use their expertise within a lethal and demanding environment. Our Afghan Security Partners were equally taken aback as we worked to demonstrate the shift from partnered operations to advisor operations and the associated changes and constraints that would result. Instead of having a troop or company conducting partnered operations, often at the squadron level, we now had an advisor team with a security detachment taking the place of that larger force of combat power and capability. This was an exercise in expectation management with the Afghans, and I initially did not have the trust in the ability of the advisor teams because I had not had the opportunity to exercise the art of command in validating their strengths and weaknesses.

Because of this unfamiliarity, I decided that I would accompany the first advised operation we conducted, which was an air assault operation into the Sheh Khan Valley, near the Arghandab River in Zabul Province. We were on the ground for about fifteen minutes before the advisor team leader stepped on a buried Improvised Explosive Device and had to be medevaced. So immediately the team’s leadership was gone and the team was visibly shaken to the point that they were unsure if they could accomplish their mission. They recovered, although we maintained squadron oversight of the mission and additional advisor team leadership was brought out to augment our forces over the course of the operation. As our mission command doctrine states, commanders recognize that tactical operations “take a toll on the moral, physical, and mental stamina of Soldiers,” and they “use their presence to lead their forces effectively.”<sup>8</sup> Leaders have to be at the right place at the right time.

To add another illustration of mission command to this story, it was during one of our most lethal fights of this operation in the Sheh Khan Valley that our Alpha Troop, detached to another command operating in Uruzghan province, was targeted in a suicide vest attack. As a commander on top of a remote hill in the rugged terrain of Zabul province, over eighty kilometers away from the squadron operations center, I knew almost immediately what was going on in Uruzghan province and knew the name and status of the Soldiers wounded in that attack. This was a testament to our ability to exercise mission command, and more importantly, to the extraordinary ability of the Soldiers trained to exercise those mission command systems and make things happen while keeping their leadership informed.

There are those who would, and indeed did argue, that my actions as a commander in Deh Chopan, the Tolikum Valley, and the Sheh Khan Valley were in violation of mission command. You cannot be a “squad leader” during a specific action, some might argue, when you have an entire squadron to command. Perhaps a squadron commander should remain removed from the situation on the ground and use the systems offered by the command post to fight the fight from a remote location – but the art of mission command lies in commanders making those assessments and acting accordingly depending upon his or her awareness of the situation. To firmly make the call one way or the other, or dismiss it outright, demonstrates a misunderstood or misinformed view of our mission command doctrine. It is always necessary to “centralize or decentralize control of operations as needed” while effectively “allowing subordinates freedom of action” to execute mission orders.<sup>9</sup> In my own view, after much thought and reflection, my actions in these operations and many others were appropriate.



Having said that, as a commander, I did not always get it right. My thoughts go to a remote observation post near Mizan, where one of our recon platoons fell victim to an inside attack, or “green on blue” incident, where four Americans lost their lives. I had visited the platoon four days prior to the attack, and perhaps if I had been there with them on the ground that cold night in September, or been less willing to accept the tactical risk of the mission, things might have happened differently. What I do know is that because of effective mission command we knew what had happened almost immediately. Despite both myself and a troop commander being over seventy kilometers away from the attack, we were able to get there within an hour, through an IED belt, because we knew the terrain, we were informed, and we had developed the relationships. I also knew who was out there leading the fight, taking charge, and getting our wounded Soldiers off the battlefield to survive. I attribute that to mission command and to knowing each other – that mutual trust and shared understanding built through leader presence and the art of command.

It is leader presence and the art of command that will enable our ability to achieve the standard of mutual trust and shared understanding between commanders and subordinates that is required on the modern battlefield, just like Sherman and Grant in the battles of the Civil War. This is a vital and necessary undertaking, as evidenced by recent comments by the 39th Chief of Staff of the Army General Mark Milley:

We are the best-equipped, best-trained and best-led Army in the world, but we cannot rest on our laurels. We must get better. The world is rapidly changing, and the future is unpredictable and uncertain. We will adapt, we will change – that is a given. We will build capacity now to set conditions for future growth and capability to respond to any threat. We are an organization that has evolved to meet the challenges over more than 240 years, and we will change yet again to meet the challenges of the future. When called upon, we will be ready to win with tough, ethical, competent and well-led soldiers who will fight anywhere, anytime, against any foe as the world’s premier ground combat force – an Army that remains the most versatile and lethal land force on Earth, valued by our friends and feared by our enemies.<sup>10</sup>

If we continue to examine and reflect upon our actions in training and combat, share our experiences and lessons learned, and continue to embrace and exercise the spirit of mission command, we can and will be successful in this endeavor – our history shows us this and our future demands it.

## Notes

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## **Chapter 3**

### **The Supremacy of Trust**

First Lieutenant James L. Tollefson

In late 2006, as insurgent forces continued to gain momentum throughout Iraq, hope began to flag that a successful conclusion to Operation Iraqi Freedom was possible. The Iraq Study Group, formed at the behest of President George W. Bush, counseled in December of that year that “the situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating,” there was “no guarantee for success,” and that among the Iraqi people themselves “pessimism is pervasive.”<sup>1</sup> Such pessimism was well-founded. Thousands of Iraqi citizens died each month, while hundreds of thousands more had fled to the relative safety of Syria, Jordan, and other nearby states. Violence ran the gamut from extremist Islamist resistance to organized crime and sectarian attempts at ethnic cleansing. The only constant in these dark days was the misery of the long-suffering Iraqi people.

Into this maelstrom President Bush ordered the deployment of five additional combat brigades – nearly thirty thousand troops – in what came to be called the surge.<sup>2</sup> Fierce fighting ensued, with many casualties sustained by combatants and civilians alike. Yet a year later, as 2007 drew to a close, it became clear that the insurgency had been dealt a crippling blow. Attacks against coalition forces dropped dramatically, as did the number of civilian casualties. The surge succeeded against staggering odds, and hope for eventual success became again something attainable, though uncertain.

Company B, 3rd Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment deployed to Iraq in October of 2006, the same month that civilian deaths reached a record monthly high of 3,700. The company played an important role in many of the critical operations of the surge in 2007, effectively pacifying a critical insurgent staging area in the key town of Al Karmah in Al Anbar Province and conducting numerous air assault operations in the Tigris-Euphrates river valley as part of Strike Force Geronimo, the main effort in the 3rd Infantry Division’s Operation Marne Avalanche. These operations resulted in the death or capture of hundreds of insurgent fighters. When the unit redeployed in late 2007, its leaders could rightfully boast that they “had honored the sacrifice and proud tradition of those paratroopers who had come before.”<sup>3</sup>

This paper does not concern itself with the grand strategy of the Iraq surge, nor does it delve into the operational art behind Operation Marne Avalanche and the effort to destroy Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Instead it focuses on the bond of trust between leaders and led as they faced the fierce test of combat in the cities, fields, and deserts of Iraq. It was there, at the individual Soldier level, that the hoped-for success of the Iraq surge was realized.

Fundamental to the success of Army units is the establishment of mutual trust between leaders and led. There are no shortcuts, grand strategies, or easy answers here. It is the innumerable, unremarkable, daily acts of candor and consideration that establish this trust; and it is this trust, once established, that sustains Soldiers through the ordeal of combat and enables mission command. The exercise of mission command is based, in part, on this mutual trust.<sup>4</sup> This paper briefly examines the establishment of such mutual trust through the lens of Company B, 3/509 IN (ABN) during counterinsurgency operations in western Iraq during the surge in 2007.

### **Preparation**

The 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) possesses a proud lineage dating to World War II, where its Soldiers conducted the United States’ first combat airborne operation, earned the first airborne Medal of Honor, and participated in campaigns in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, and southern France. The regiment deactivated after World War II, although portions of it reactivated in various capacities in subsequent years. 3rd Battalion reactivated in the fall of 2005 as part of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division at Fort Richardson, Alaska. As a tribute to its World War II lineage, the unit maintained the World War II-era designations for its line companies: Able, Baker, Charlie, and Dog.

No one who in-processed to Baker Company in 2005 bore any illusions about the purpose of their service or the challenges that lay ahead. The insurgency in Iraq continued to gain momentum against Coalition Forces, and the conflict in Afghanistan, though largely overshadowed by the larger operations in Iraq, continued into its fourth year. The commander, Captain Jeffrey Roberts, a veteran of the conflict in Afghanistan, knew very well what his Soldiers would soon face. Comprised of raw graduates from Infantry One Station Unit Training (OSUT), and many non-commissioned officers (NCOs) who had not yet deployed, the company comprised a great deal of raw talent but very little combat experience. The challenge his company faced, as the battalion colors emerged from their case to greet the Alaskan autumn sun, was to become a team capable of closing with and destroying an adaptive and ruthless adversary fighting on its home ground.

With one year to prepare for its scheduled deployment, the company launched into a tireless program of foot marches, individual and collective training, and winter bivouacs in temperatures that often lingered below zero degrees Fahrenheit for weeks at a stretch. The training program was rigorous, intense, and continuous. Soldier proficiency with weapons, communication systems, personal equipment, and individual combat skills was drilled through months of ranges, foot marches, exercises, and NCO-led classes. As proficiency increased, so also did the sort of good-natured competition between individuals, teams, squads, and platoons natural to well-trained units. The company training plan encouraged this competitive instinct. Foot marches were frequently individual affairs, with assigned routes that each individual completed independently. These marches quickly became foot races, with Soldiers frequently running the entire eight to ten mile routes under a full combat load. Physical fitness tests, qualification ranges, and obstacle courses also quickly developed into aggressive physical contests, with Soldiers driving themselves to their physical and psychological limits to gain and maintain acceptance within the unit's rapidly forming esprit de corps.

Key to this was the constant presence of leaders in every event. Leaders, no less than led, participated in and attempted to dominate each training event. The rapid expansion of the wartime Army ensured that far fewer NCOs were available than the company required, and competition among junior enlisted Soldiers for coveted team leader positions was fierce and unforgiving. Platoon leaders and NCOs participated in every event, sharing their Soldiers' hardships and driving their men forward by a combination of personal example and unspoken expectation.

Training rapidly progressed from individual to collective events. Although this process culminated with a brigade rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, the defining moment of the company's pre-deployment training occurred during the platoon evaluations. Each platoon executed this arduous three-day event, which included over forty miles of dismounted movements under full combat loads over thousands of vertical feet of mountainous terrain, extended movements to contact through multiple objectives, a platoon raid executed on an abandoned Nike Hercules missile site, mounted patrolling, and an air assault. Many Soldiers, upon arriving back at their barracks, literally collapsed from exhaustion and had to be forcibly roused and carried to their rooms.

The impact of this single training event is scarcely describable. Tough, realistic, and brutally difficult, the platoon evaluations brought every Soldier in the company to the brink of physical and psychological exhaustion, a point where further exertion seemed impossible. Yet throughout, despite the physical difficulty of the training, the men sustained one another. They carried one another's loads, bandaged each other's feet, shared their meals in dogged silence, and carried on. Having survived the ordeal, they realized with quiet satisfaction that they were elite, that they had achieved something together that individually none would have contemplated attempting. The experience of shared hardship united leaders and led in an indissoluble bond of trust. It was there, in March 2006, that Baker Company became the cohesive team that would fight and prevail on the battlegrounds of Iraq.

## **Action**

The first months of the deployment consisted of routine patrols and occasional offensive operations meant to deny insurgents the ability to seed local roads with improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Baker

Company's 3rd Platoon, led by First Lieutenant Caleb Curlin, successfully executed a nighttime ambush that killed two insurgent fighters and provided the battalion's first combat experience since 1945. This operation, and others like it, provided the young unit with much needed experience. During 3rd Platoon's ambush one inexperienced team leader fired a 40mm flare directly over his own position, illuminating the ambush line and severely degrading his fellow Soldiers' night vision equipment. Such mistakes, fortunately unattended by fatal consequences, formed an invaluable opportunity for the company's leaders to adapt and refine their warfighting skills. Learning from these rookie moments, and honestly admitting to them during after-action reports (AARs) and patrol debriefs, continued to cement the bond of trust between the Soldiers and their leaders. Plainly, a brand new team leader in his first fight is not infallible. Key to restoring and building trust after such incidents was the candid admission of responsibility and an honest effort to learn from the mistake.

In late December 2006 Baker Company moved from its original battlespace south of Baghdad to a pair of outposts in the hotly contested town of Al Karmah in Al Anbar province. Karmah was a key staging area for insurgent forces fighting in Ar Ramadi, Al Fallujah, and Baghdad.<sup>5</sup> Control of Karmah enabled insurgents to mass forces against either major population center at will, and provided a refuge where they could manufacture IEDs and resupply, train, and stage their fighters. Karmah was dominated by AQI groups armed with a variety of small arms, rifle and rocket propelled grenades, and improvised explosive devices. Although the explosively formed penetrators (EFPs) that had become the bane of Baghdad-based units' existence were rare in Karmah, the area was a manufactory for significant numbers of vehicle-borne, deep-buried, and chlorine IEDs. These were typically command-detonated using a combination of pressure plates and command wires. Additionally, the insurgents possessed 122mm and 60mm mortars with enough rounds to support daily attacks against US outposts. Baker Company occupied two positions, with 3rd Platoon in the town's Iraqi Police (IP) station along the main road into the town connecting Ramadi and Fallujah and the remainder of the company a kilometer away in the heart of the town.

Although the US Marine Corps had long maintained a presence at the IP station, they had been severely undermanned and unable to actively patrol the town. The US presence increased fivefold with the arrival of Baker Company, which immediately began aggressively patrolling the area. Unwilling to quietly acquiesce to the loss of a community of such operational significance, the local AQI affiliate quickly responded with multiple daily mortar, sniper, rocket, and small arms attacks. A typical day at the IP station would see two to three attacks, one or more of which would normally include indirect fire. Sniper attacks were a constant threat, with local fighters deliberately and effectively aiming for Soldiers' throats to defeat their body armor. These attacks caused numerous casualties, including the death in May of Sergeant Ryan Baum, the company medic.

As winter turned to spring, the effectiveness of the insurgent's attacks increased significantly. On 7 April, a 122mm mortar attack on the Karmah IP station penetrated the reinforced concrete roof of 3rd Platoon's command post, killing Specialist Adam Spohn and severely injuring two others. One of the platoon's forward observers, Specialist Amado Larrazaleta, was blown from the command post by the force of the explosion that killed Specialist Spohn and sustained a concussion that rendered him briefly unconscious. Regaining his senses, he ran to the rooftop and called a counterbattery fire mission of 155mm and 120mm high explosive shells. Subsequent reports from local informers indicated that this mission successfully destroyed the team that had launched the attack.

As the situation deteriorated, the local insurgents decided to launch a final all-out assault to destroy 3rd Platoon at the IP station. At 1654 on 12 April, insurgent fighters attacked Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry at their position at OP Omar approximately 3 kilometers northeast of the Karmah IP station. Five minutes later, at 1659, the main effort opened fire on the IP station with approximately 20-30 rounds of 122mm and 60mm mortars and sustained small arms fire from the north, east, and west. Immediately following the mortar attack, as suppressive fires continued to batter 3rd Platoon's defensive positions, an orange dump truck heavily laden with explosives careened into the IP station's entry control point and

detonated, obliterating the entry control point, a high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV) parked near the entrance, and the nearby US guard tower. 3rd Platoon responded in kind with withering machine gun, rifle, and grenade fire, effectively repulsing their attackers before they could exploit the breach.

The insurgents supported their attack with a well-coordinated cordon of all major avenues of approach, with IEDs planted on every route leading to the site and supporting attacks launched against both the 1/501st position to the north and the Baker Company headquarters at OP3 to the west. The final toll was eight 3rd Platoon wounded, the complete destruction of three M1114 HMMWVs, the collapse of one guard tower, and the effective obliteration of the IP station entry control point. Eight dead insurgents were discovered in subsequent efforts to clear the area, although enemy casualties were likely much higher due to their practice of removing casualties from the battlefield before Coalition Forces could recover them. The bodies were recovered at the base of a nearby mosque, where accurate US machine gun fire had annihilated the entire team emplaced there, thus preventing their removal. In the weeks that followed, as the Anbar Awakening took place and insurgent attacks dropped precipitously, it became clear that with the repulse of this assault, Karmah's insurgents had been severely weakened. US Marine Corps operations the following summer, after Baker Company left the area to join Strike Force Geronimo, finished the job.

Throughout the fight of 12 April, which would prove the most intense of the company's deployment, Baker Company's young paratroopers performed superbly. 3rd Platoon had sustained eleven casualties in less than a week, including the death of Specialist Spohn. Isolated, undermanned, and now defending a perimeter torn to shreds by the events of the day, the platoon was shaken and apprehensive of what the next few days might bring. As the platoon worked feverishly through a sleepless night to render their positions defensible again, the questions uppermost in every mind were "what will the morning bring?" and "does anyone appreciate what we've done here?"

The next day the battalion commander and command sergeant major arrived at the IP station. There was no fanfare to their visit. Each walked quietly throughout the small compound, talking to Soldiers and assessing the situation. One young paratrooper, walking up to his guard shift early that morning, weary after a sleepless night, met the sergeant major standing at the top of the wooden stairs that led to the compound's rooftop guard towers. Asked where the round struck that killed Specialist Spohn, he pointed and replied, "There, behind those sandbags."

The sergeant major's eyes, filled with inexpressible sadness, followed the arc of the young Soldier's pointing finger. No more was said; volumes were communicated. Can words describe the effect this moment had on that young man, after seeing so many of his comrades shed their blood on that rooftop over the last seven days? After eight years they still cannot.

Why do Soldiers obey the men who lead them knowingly into harm's way? This is the fundamental question every combat leader must answer. Certainly it is not ignorance of the potential consequences. The Soldiers of 3rd Platoon knew when they enlisted that they would go to war. They went to Iraq knowing that not all would return. On the morning of 13 April they went doggedly back to work with the blood of their comrades staining the post upon which they labored. Yet still they labored, willingly obedient to orders the genesis of which they had no part of and the purpose of which they did not always know. Why?

It has been so often said that Soldiers fight for each other rather than for a cause that it has become a truism. Yet equally important to a Soldier's motivation and morale is the knowledge that his leaders genuinely care what happens to him. It takes little to accomplish this. Sometimes it takes no more than a leader's unexpected visit and an unspoken gesture of sorrow at the price that must be paid. It is in these apparently unremarkable moments that the young Soldier realizes that his sacrifices are not in vain. After all, if these men who lead him do genuinely care about him, and yet nonetheless order him into harm's way, then there must be a reason. If they care for him and his comrades, and yet nonetheless persevere in the bitter struggle, then it must not be without cause. And so the young Soldier perseveres, even unto death, trusting his leaders not because they will preserve him at any cost, but rather because they will not risk him without reason.

Throughout Baker Company's time in Karmah, such demonstrations of concern for Soldier welfare were commonplace. The details of unit administration became issues of immense importance. The timeliness of mail, the ability to occasionally call or email folks back home, the monthly luxury of a hot shower, forward stationing of cooks and maintainers to the combat outposts in support of the line units, and the attendance by battalion leadership of memorial services for the fallen were items of immense importance to every Soldier in the company. To their credit, the company and battalion leadership fulfilled their obligations in these areas. Though showers, mail call, internet and phone access, and other luxuries were rare, no one doubted that every effort was made to provide them. Every Soldier knew that his leaders cared about his trivial comforts, and precisely because these things were trivial every Soldier knew that his leaders were exerting greater efforts on that which was of ultimate importance – winning the fight and returning home honorably.

Baker Company left Karmah in June, 2007 and returned to Forward Operating Base (FOB) Kalsu in Babil Province. Upon arriving the unit immediately assumed responsibility for conducting Strike Force Geronimo air assault missions throughout the Tigris-Euphrates river valley in support of the Third Infantry Division's Operation Marne Avalanche.<sup>6</sup> For the remainder of the deployment the unit conducted dozens of these missions, capturing scores of suspected insurgents and large quantities of munitions and IED materiel. After months of heavy fighting and substantial casualties, these missions provided a much appreciated change in tempo.

What is perhaps most remarkable about the effect of Soldier trust in unit leadership is that it is, in its effects, completely unremarkable. The Soldiers of Baker Company could very well have been reduced to ineffectiveness by the events of January – June 2007. Yet Baker Company quietly returned to FOB Kalsu, assumed a very demanding set of missions, and executed each of them superbly. At the individual Soldier level there was little complaining, grumbling, or questioning why after so much fighting the company received a mission that would again expose it to a great deal of potential danger while other units continued to run routine patrols. After five and a half months of nearly constant fighting there was absolute faith in the competence of the unit leadership and a quiet determination to finish strong.

The Army's leadership doctrine rightfully states that trust enables mission command.<sup>7</sup> In training and in war, trust is supreme. Hemingway perhaps expressed it best when he wrote, "In combat there must be discipline. For many things are not as they appear. Discipline must come from trust and confidence."<sup>8</sup> To the extent that commanders engender trust among their subordinates, they provide the environment within which they have the freedom to exercise their right to command. To the extent that such trust is lacking, so also evaporates a commander's ability to achieve results. This trust is not earned through heroic gestures or grand turns of phrase, but rather through simple everyday acts of genuine human warmth and consideration motivated by a sincere concern for Soldier welfare. It is these simple things that Baker Company's leadership did, and it is to these unremarkable and easily overlooked daily actions that its leaders owed their success.

## Notes

1. James A. Baker et al., *The Iraq Study Group Report* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 6.
2. Dale Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad: The 3d Infantry Division and Task Force Marne in Iraq, 2007-2008* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2010), xv.
3. "At the End of the Day." (n.d.) *The Art of James Dietz*. <http://www.jamesdietz.com/proddetail.php?prod=jd-pr-109> (accessed 20 October 2015).
4. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2012), 2.
5. Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad*, 17.
6. Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad*, 181.
7. Department of the Army, ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2012), 6-7.
8. Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), 158.



## Chapter 4

### Shared Understanding - Gaining Ground in a Complex World

Captain Daniel W. Krueger

#### The Need for Shared Understanding

“What should we do?” This question, although seemingly small, is the precursor to many significant decisions by leaders at all levels. Military leaders face this question every single day, and the consequences of the decisions can be monumental. As a result, these leaders strive to collect the necessary knowledge from many different sources in order to make the right decision.

The world today is one of uncertainty and the Army has tasked its leaders to “win in a complex world.”<sup>1</sup> One of the most important ways to respond to these challenges is by creating shared understanding. Shared understanding allows leaders to make decisions with the widest amount of available information, then empowers subordinates to make decisions with a better understanding of the environment and the potential outcomes of their actions. The Army’s ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, confirms this, saying “Shared understanding and purpose form the *basis* for unity of effort and trust.”<sup>2</sup>

A potential issue that was identified while writing this paper was that a review of Army literature failed to generate a refined definition of exactly what constitutes shared understanding. Is this something we simply know when we see? ADRP 6-0 seems to go the furthest in painting the picture of what holding a shared understanding might look like:

A defining challenge for commanders and staffs is creating shared understanding of their operational environment, their operation’s purpose, its problems, and approaches to solving them. Shared understanding and purpose form the basis for unity of effort and trust. Commanders and staffs actively build and maintain shared understanding within the force and with unified action partners by maintaining collaboration and dialogue throughout the operations process (planning, preparation, execution, and assessment).<sup>3</sup>

Particularly within an Army context, it is worth saying that a shared understanding must be grounded in commander’s intent, defined in JP 3-0 as “a clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state that supports mission command, provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander’s desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned.”<sup>4</sup> A simple definition of shared understanding for the purpose of this project is as follows: a common knowledge of the problems faced, the means available for addressing those problems, and the authorities available for action within the commander’s intent. This definition is intentionally simple, but meant to capture the idea that leaders at all levels understand their environment, their tools, and the expectations for action.

In 2013, Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment used shared understanding to tackle daily complexities during a time when America’s involvement in Afghanistan was quickly changing. The unit was situated in Logar Province, just south of Kabul, and had a myriad of objectives under the umbrella of improving the security situation. The primary objectives were as follows:

1. Mentor Afghan security forces in professional expertise.
2. Convince people of the local area to trust those forces.
3. Protect the major American base in the middle of the unit’s operating area, a pressing and constant requirement.

None of these objectives existed in an isolated environment. The subject of each objective – protection of the base, the local people’s trust, and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) – could all benefit from the advancement of the others and were in fact key to solving each problem. The enemy, key stakeholders

in the civilian population, higher level decisions, and many other factors would also determine the outcome of these objectives. In this fashion, the unit faced challenges that are not unique to any organization. There were also the familiar organizational limitations of limited time, resources, and manpower.

In this complicated environment, leaders had to make daily decisions that carried effects both positive and negative. Over time, the unit learned that a shared understanding of the environment, gained through as many sources as possible, was the most important component for being able to take action with limited information.

## **The Research**

Creating shared understanding has been recognized by leading military leaders, business leaders, and academics as pivotal for achieving success in a quickly changing world. It empowers people at all levels to implement plans with an understanding of the organization's goals along with empowering them to seize opportunities and react quickly to problems. General (Ret.) Stanley McChrystal, whose well-known advocacy of new problem-solving approaches inside and outside of the military, wrote in the book *Team of Teams*, "The key reason for the success of empowered execution lay in what had come before it: the foundation of shared consciousness."<sup>5</sup> Dr. Jeffrey Conklin, a researcher in collaborative technology and noted author and consultant, argues that shared understanding is essential for tackling "Wicked problems, also referred to as ill-structured, messy, or unsolvable, and are more than just highly complex." The idea of solving "wicked problems" is certainly something that rings close to the sound of "win in a complex world," both being descriptions of what the Army will continue to be asked to do in the 21st century.<sup>6</sup>

However, Dr. Conklin and others agree that there is a necessity to develop formats for building shared understanding and tackling challenges in today's world. General McChrystal famously worked towards shared understanding among the task force he commanded by bringing people together during video teleconferences. This is an example of a medium, but the messaging from leadership and fostering of a culture of openness is really the key element. Whatever forum is chosen, leaders must use it to build an understanding of goals, expectations, understanding, and trust. Lieutenant Colonel (later Lieutenant General) James Dubik discussed how to do this in the Army in the June 1992 edition of *Military Review*, notably long before the prominence of the internet. He wrote, "To develop a unit capable of using a decentralized method of command takes time, effort, and a specific environment in which to flourish. A decentralized method of command cannot be adopted by doctrinal decree or by simple command directive," later adding, "Commanders must understand that command and control of their units using a decentralized approach requires a training and education process, a common outlook, mutual trust, and a uniform perspective in tactical operations."<sup>7</sup>

These perspectives address the common misconception that mission command is not about letting everyone on the battlefield decide on their own what to do, but about building a shared understanding of what is taking place, what resources are available to affect the problem, and what the expectation is for action. This allows leaders at all levels to exploit the initiative, a key part of the Army's definition of unified land operations.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, though the need for this type of organization and leadership may have been highlighted by the ubiquity of technology, its roots for use by military leadership are much more historical.<sup>9</sup>

## **How an Infantry Company Focused on Building Shared Understanding**

Though it sounds like a simple problem, figuring out how to share information is not necessarily easy. People tend to focus on their daily requirements and it takes structures, nurtured by a culture, to bring together the relevant information. Thankfully for Bravo Company, the unit's personnel were able to meet on a regular basis face-to-face, but the group still needed mediums that forced a flow of information.

One way we accomplished this structure was through a briefing format. Patrol leaders were required at the end of each day to share what their objectives were, what actually happened, and what the experience suggested. Questions and thoughts were encouraged during the interlude between debriefs where other



Figure 1: Creating Shared Understanding with Afghan Counterparts. Author photo.

leaders came into the discussion on what each interaction implied. The focus was not on binary results, but on what the meaning of the observations showed us. This mentality took time to develop, but eventually became ingrained in each leader's mind.

Another way to force discussion was by graphically depicting the problems. For us, this typically meant putting up a blank map and collaborating on what we were seeing in each part of the area, but other times it meant putting up an organizational chart of local enemy and civilian influences then deliberately questioning its validity. The focus during these discussions was on grappling with what we saw as reality as opposed to sitting passively and receiving the information.

These types of processes were not limited to those within the American unit. We conducted the same exercises with our Afghan counterparts on both the civilian and military side. Getting their opinions was more difficult, but in the end typically proved much more valuable as we gained a diversity of perspectives and further challenged our own assumptions. Over time, we focused on bringing various Afghan organizations together to have these types of talks and we transitioned to the role of mere facilitators.

Whether our efforts produced long term success is something that's difficult to assess, but by the end of the deployment we were seeing some significant reasons for optimism. Communication within the ANSF, and between them and the people, had increased significantly and collaboration was starting to take place on some seemingly intractable challenges. At the very least, the networks for tackling problems were starting to take place. We were seeing and hearing about better quality training and decreased complaints from the local population about the conduct of Afghan forces. From our security focused perspective, we saw fewer attacks against both US and Afghan bases and personnel. Like many units in the country have experienced, we felt that true success could still be years away, but things were going in the right direction.

Shifting towards sharing information not only helped the company to understand what was going on around us, but also helped the entire organization understand what they should do when they had to make a difficult call on the ground. In addition to being better informed, because we had talked through our goals extensively, leaders understood how to work towards the organization's goals even when the paths to get there were not perfectly clear.

## What Are the Lessons Learned

It would be easy to attack the lessons learned here by saying that things that work in relatively small organizations like a company are not easily adopted by larger organizations. This assertion misses the point that larger organizations can try to adopt the nimble, adaptive nature of smaller organizations. Furthermore, it is important to note that today's technologies give large organizations many more tools for sharing between people in different places.

The ideas presented here are not specific to any organization. They are methods that can and should be applied in any environment where there are a great deal of unknowns, a vast array of influences, and a need for autonomous decision making. Building an organization that operates this way also does not happen overnight.

The first step to this type of environment is getting each participant to understand their role. Today's technology allows us to share information in unprecedented ways, but each participant must embrace the need for them to interact with the system. Putting information into the system and receiving feedback on

similar observations and challenges is an important adjustment in a world where many are used to being in only receive mode based on how technology and many parts of our society still work (traditional education still hinges largely on lectures from teachers to students).

Additional consideration must be given to the nature of how people connect, whether it be through meetings, video conferencing, wiki-style forums, message boards, or other mediums. These platforms should all be designed to facilitate open dialogue while still meeting the goals of maintaining organization and reporting. Much of the weight for this imperative falls on leaders who create expectations for participation, critical thought, and the proper role for dissenting opinions.

Leaders also have to know how to guide their organizations toward broader goals within these types of environments. There is a very alluring temptation to criticize work towards shared understanding and decentralized decision making as risky and moving away towards the focus required to achieve intended outcomes. When managed correctly, these type of efforts become a way for the leader to better understand the environment, but also for the leader to more clearly present their goals. Receiving input from across the organization sometimes reveals that not everyone has as clear an understanding of priorities as a leader initially believed. Maintaining a consistent two-way dialogue can help work out the discord before it turns into negative outcome.

### **Implications for the Future – Broader Scale**

Future conflict is likely to be more complex and *faster*. In order for units to exploit opportunities, leaders will have to maximize their understanding of the situation around them so they can make the best decision at the right point in time. Some might call this “situational awareness,” which is an appropriate term, and something that must go up and down the chain of command. Decentralized decision making also requires leaders at all levels to understand goals and commander’s intent.

Shared understanding will also continue to be a requirement across organizations. As more US agencies, foreign militaries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other forces take part in military missions, all sides must work to share understanding of mission, situation, and culture. Along this line, British and American researchers working on a combined project between the US Army and UK Ministry of Defence suggested the following definition, “Shared understanding is the ability of multiple agents to coordinate their behaviours with respect to each other in order to support the realization of common goals or objectives.”<sup>10</sup> This definition gets at the heart of the need for shared understanding. Creating shared understanding is a necessity for achieving organizational goals.

As the Army prepares for this new reality, it must look at how leaders embrace these concepts and prepare for the realities of the 21st century security environment. Leaders should look at how their organization uses both official and unofficial forms of communication to share information. They should also look at the organizational culture, examining how all parties demonstrate understanding of the mission and the context in which it takes place.

“I found that common understanding to be the essential enabler for fast-paced, decentralized operations. But the effort required to attain and maintain that level of shared understanding is remarkable - it takes changing how the entire command processes and shares information - and runs starkly against the grain of most layered command structures and processes - and challenges the desire of many individuals and organizations to control information.” Senior Flag Officer 2013. (Quoted in: *Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper: Mission Command and Cross-Domain Synergy*.)

## Notes

1. US Army Training and Doctrine Command, *The US Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* (TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1) (Fort Eustis, VA, 2014). This phrase was codified in The US Army's Operating Concept and is routinely used by senior leaders to explain the mission of the Army.
2. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 3.
3. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-3.
4. This definition was adopted by the Army in 2012 in ADRP 6-0.
5. Stanley McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2015), 215.
6. Jeffrey Conklin, *Dialogue Mapping: Building Shared Understanding of Wicked Problems* (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2006), 27.
7. LTC James M. Dubik, "Decentralized Command: Translating Theory into Practice," *Military Review* (June 1992), 27.
8. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, 1.
9. John Silva, "Auftragstaktik: Its Origin and Development," *Infantry* 79 (September-October 1989), 6-9.
10. Paul R. Smart et al., "Shared Understanding within Military Coalitions: A Definition and Review of Research Challenges," (Conference Paper, 2009), <http://eprints.soton.ac.uk/267173> (accessed 14 December 2015), 3.



## Chapter 5

# Introducing Learning Agility to US Army Mission Command

Colonel Alan J. Boyer

A compelling need exists for the US Army to understand what learning agility is, how it can be measured, and how it can be applied to develop future leaders within the construct of the mission command philosophy. Over the past decade, combat environments like Iraq and Afghanistan required leaders to make sense of the chaos and develop a shared understanding across both military formations and other elements of national power. The ability to create that understanding, which was critical for operational effectiveness, required leaders who could collaborate and rapidly build trust throughout their organization to meet the information requirements requisite to winning. With the 2014 US Army Operating Concept characterizing future operating environments as largely unknown and unknowable, the requirement for agile and adaptive leaders to solve complex and challenging problems in times of conflict is not going to go away.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it is going to get harder. As a result, the US Army as an institution must strive to better understand how to learn, and how to learn rapidly, when operating in ambiguous or unknown environments.

Senior leaders across the US Army are consistently looking for ways to enhance leadership and they often articulate the responsibility to develop it. But junior leaders today are challenged to balance an approach to leadership that is both transactional and transformational in style in order to meet the performance requirements expected of their unit against the function of time.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, we remain a results-oriented profession driven by details, statistics, and outcomes. This typically results in a transactional process that is short-sighted in developing others, as the individual's development takes a back seat to achieving organizational results. On the other hand, we desire to develop critical thinkers who are reflective, imaginative, and purposeful in innovating solutions to solve challenging problems; a behavioral culture which takes time, effort, an often countermands how the leader maintains his authenticity in the organization.<sup>3</sup> Investing that time in transformational leadership, while difficult, focuses our efforts on our most important asset which is our people.

Our leader development challenge thus becomes a mission command doctrine reliant on a leader's agility and adaptation, but lacking a methodology and approach to develop specified roles and behaviors required for effective strategic leadership. The emergence of hybrid threats, global connectivity and access to information, and the strategic expectations to wage warfare as a whole of government approach will continue to drive leaders into areas of unfamiliarity. Our Soldiers will continue to demand authentic leaders who embody trust, honesty, and goodness – attributes that are essential to the mission command philosophy.<sup>4</sup> But what if authenticity alone just isn't good enough? What if we also require adaptive leaders who can rely on their experience when the environment is similar as well as agile leaders who are capable of finding solutions when it is dissimilar or new?

The social-psychological behaviors associated with learning agility are measurable and known to be critical to a leader's ability to avoid being outpaced such operating environments. Agile learning theory centers on an individual's willingness to learn and reflect on experiences and apply lessons learned to improve performance of the organization within the operating environment. To be visionary, exceptional, and ultimately transformative requires developing such behaviors in each leader.

Recent organizational psychology research defines learning agility as “the ability to come up to speed quickly in one's understanding of a situation and move across ideas flexibly in service of learning both within and across experiences. Learning agility comprises both processing and perceptual speed as well as flexible cognition.”<sup>5</sup> In this manner, the agile learner sees patterns quickly, avoids the pitfall of getting stuck in a particular point of view, minimizes commitment issues by being able to abandon courses of action that are not working, and possesses resilience in the face of adversity.

Agile learning theory deliberately focuses on behavior, as no scientist to date has been successful in getting inside a person's mind to truly understand, or predict, one's cognitive capabilities. How an individual, or leader, behaves is a function of their personality interacting with an environment. Social-organizational psychology further suggests that behavior, as it relates to an individual's personality, is similar to how climate conveys an organization's culture. Making sense of either an individual's personality or an organization's culture is a difficult endeavor characterized by judgements and inconsistencies. Transforming the culture of the US Army to institutionalize the tenets of the mission command philosophy requires the development and measurement of behavioral qualities defined by the doctrine itself. It is a process that begins by asking ourselves, "How do we create agile leaders capable of solving complex problems in a timely manner with creative solutions in unknown and unknowable environments?"

This process starts with a leader's measurable behavior of learning agility and is critical to the development of strategic leaders. While a number of inputs and factors influence learning agility, it can be codified into nine behavioral dimensions: which include feedback seeking, information seeking, performance risk taking, interpersonal risk taking, collaborating, experimenting, reflecting, flexibility, and speed.<sup>6</sup> Social and organizational psychologists at some of our nation's top universities continue to seek out measurable tools to enable leaders to determine how often they engage in learning agility behaviors. Their research focuses on both an individual's awareness as well as multi-rater feedback from peers and subordinates regarding their perception of a leader's behaviors during shared experiences. Ultimately, the data collected from these behavioral measures can be used to provide insight into the relationship between learning and experience in order to enhance the development of strategic leaders.

The US Army's concept of mission command is a philosophy highly dependent on experiential learning and adaptation. As a warfighting function it demands transformational leadership to balance the art of command and science of control in order to integrate the movement and maneuver, protection, intelligence, sustainment, and fires warfighting functions.<sup>7</sup> In this manner, a commander's primary tasks are to drive the operations process, develop teams, and inform and influence audiences.<sup>8</sup> Doing so requires the activities of understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing operations; all tasks that are accomplished more efficiently and effectively when the leader displays the behaviors associated with learning agility.

Transformational leadership effects organizational behavior through a process centered on creating vision and inspiration. In contrast to transaction, "transformational leadership produces greater effects than transactional leadership. Whereas transactional leadership results in expected outcomes, transformational leadership results in performance that goes well beyond what is expected."<sup>9</sup> As a result, transformational leadership offers a more methodical approach to developing others because it is deeply rooted in emotions, values, ethics, and standards and achieves long-term goals through consistent emphasis on changing and transforming people.<sup>10</sup>

Individuals who possess both high levels of authenticity and high levels of learning agility are more likely to practice exceptional leadership that is transformational in nature. While authenticity remains a required behavior, agile learners also possess both cognitive speed and flexibility and are able to process multiple data rapidly in an unknown combat environment and then recognize patterns across multiple actors, agencies, and activities. Agile learners develop from one's experiences to achieve context for transformational organizational leadership.

Introducing learning agility theory to the US Army is the first step in an approach to enhance how we develop leaders for strategic success. In order to address the methodology of how to train and develop transformative leadership, we must first understand the science behind it. Understanding learning agility and how it is applicable to changing leader as well as organizational behavior is fundamental to establishing the imperatives and priorities that define what and how we are trying to develop. Getting from here to there



and sense making of ambiguous, complex, and unknown environments starts by applying the very essence of learning agility: to stop, think, and collaborate on where it is we are actually trying to go.

## Notes

1. Department of the Army, *The US Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World 2020-2040*, TRADOC Pam 525-3-1 (Fort Monroe, VA: US Department of the Army, 7 October 2014), iii.
2. Peter Northouse in his book *Leadership: Theory and Practice* notes that transactional leadership has an impact on behavior through a process focused on a system of rewards and punishments whereby the leader possesses influence because it is in the best interests of the followers to do what the leader wants. Since the nature of a transaction is contingent on an exchange, this form of leadership places little emphasis on the individual needs or personal development of people. Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice, 6th Ed.* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 253-254.
3. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 10 September 2012), 2-7.
4. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 253-254.
5. D. Scott DeRue, Susan J. Ashford, and Christopher G. Myers, "Learning Agility: In Search of Conceptual Clarity and Theoretical Grounding," *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* 5, no. 3 (September 2012), 262-263.
6. Dr. W. Warner Burke, Professor Columbia University and Teachers College, interview by author, New York, New York, 20 October 2014.
7. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, 3-1.
8. From an individual perspective, this requires leaders capable of recognizing patterns across multiple actors, agencies, and activities to achieve a specific outcome. ADRP 6-0 specifically states that "agile leaders are comfortable with uncertainty and understand that disciplined initiative is an important part of being adaptive. Successful Army leaders adapt their thinking, their formations, and their employment techniques to the specific situation they face." From an organizational perspective, it is exceedingly clear that command climate, and how one exercises authority, is critical to establishing the trust, collaboration, and team work necessary for an adaptive operations process.
9. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 193.
10. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 185.

## Chapter 6

# Mission Command in Operations against DA'ISH: the Experience of the Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command - Iraq (1st Infantry Division) in 2014-15

Lieutenant Colonel John C. Lemay

The First Infantry Division Headquarters, with the command team of Major General Paul Funk and Command Sergeant Major Michael Grinston, conducted a short-notice deployment to Iraq and Kuwait in October 2014. During this deployment, the 1st Infantry Division (1ID) encountered many mission command challenges and used purpose, mutual trust, and shared understanding to overcome those challenges. 1ID created the Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command – Iraq (CJFLCC-I) and established three deployed division level mission command nodes while maintaining one at Fort Riley. The division was constrained by force manning levels which limited how many Soldiers could work at each deployed command post. This required the deployed Soldiers to multi-task by working three or more topics outside their comfort zone in duties not normally associated with their military occupational specialty.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the division established five subordinate Build Partner Capacity (BPC) sites, and by the end of the deployment CJFLCC-I had grown so that 60% of the staff were Joint or Coalition. The reason the division could deploy with little notice and be successful is that 1ID used its mission command systems for daily operations in garrison. The staff had the Command Post of the Future (CPOF) installed in their regular unclassified office computers and used it to present the litany of daily briefings required by a division staff, while the current operations section used CPOF to track the division's Regionally Aligned Force deployments to Africa, training at Fort Riley, and training center deployments.<sup>2</sup> Despite 1ID's proficiency with its mission command systems, building a new headquarters while advising and assisting a host nation military force in crisis presented many mission command challenges. This paper addresses how 1ID used purpose, mutual trust, and shared understanding to overcome those challenges.<sup>3</sup>

### Purpose

Purpose is a critical link in mission command, since commanders use mission command to integrate all actions towards a common goal.<sup>4</sup> However, in Iraq there were many different groups loosely working together, but often with different desired end-states. At the interstate level the United States sought an independent, democratic, and unified Iraq; Iran sought a Shia dominated Iraq firmly in Tehran's sphere of influence; and many allied nations focused on a strong Kurdistan.<sup>5</sup> At the intrastate level, the Shia prioritized protecting Baghdad, Shia populations, and controlling Iraq's oil wealth; the Sunni desired an end to Maliki-era retributions and fair representation in the Baghdad government; and the Kurds desired an independent Kurdish state and control of northern oil resources. Even within the US Government it was difficult to integrate the United States 3rd Army, Office of Security Cooperation – Iraq (OSC-I, a lieutenant general's headquarters), Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command – Iraq (CJFLCC-I, a major general's headquarters), and the Special Operations Joint Task Force – Iraq (SOJTF-I, a brigadier general's headquarters) all with responsibilities for the same area of operations. The tension inherent in this arrangement was captured by a statement that was made at a meeting between organizations: “If I'm the supporting command, and they are the supported command, that does not support my plan.”<sup>6</sup>

To overcome the US Government and intrastate challenges, CJFLCC-I used collaboration to build trust and create shared purpose.<sup>7</sup> Major General Funk focused on building a team of teams through positive interpersonal relationships to overcome the lack of formal command relationships. An extremely successful implementation of this approach was the SOJTF-I and CJFLCC-I combined campaign plan that drove decision-making and resourcing.<sup>8</sup> The staff of both organizations worked collaboratively to create the campaign plan, which was signed by both commanders. The process of creating the campaign plan established enduring human connections between the staffs and created shared understanding. Further, the campaign plan implemented a combined battle rhythm, epitomized by the SOJTF-I and CJFLCC-I commanders co-chairing

the Operations and Targeting Board. The combined battle rhythm provided a forum for continued dialogue, which maintained shared purpose over time. One of the key enablers of the combined campaign plan was physical location – OSC-I, SOJTF-I and CJFLCC-I all had elements co-located. Physical location was fundamental to mission command in Iraq because proximity strengthened interpersonal relationships, and interpersonal relationships rather than command authority created a common purpose.<sup>9</sup>

A similar effort was made with the Kurdish Ministry of Peshmerga (MoP) and Iraqi Ministry of Defense (MoD). The MoP and MoD were fighting two geographically distinct fights and did not coordinate with each other.<sup>10</sup> While the US Ambassador to Iraq, backed by the US Army Central Commander, made the primary effort to integrate Erbil and Baghdad, CJFLCC-I facilitated a number of combined planning sessions for the MoP and MoD. These sessions were successful in developing some discrete plans, but less successful in developing shared purpose. Two of the constraints that hindered the development of shared purpose were that the sessions often had different participants, so they did not effectively establish interpersonal relationships, and the sessions were infrequent instead of routine, so they did not develop shared understanding. Additionally, the MoP and MoD had different physical locations, and did not establish a permanent collaboration center or even robust liaison teams.

## **Mutual Trust**

Like purpose, mutual trust is a critical element of mission command. In fact, “Build cohesive teams through mutual trust” is the first principle of mission command.<sup>11</sup> Mutual trust is confidence between partners and between commanders and their subordinates.<sup>12</sup> In Iraq, CJFLCC-I had to develop confidence between itself and the Iraqi MoD, and coach Iraqi leaders to develop confidence between themselves and their subordinates.

The Tikrit offensive and the Ramadi counter-attack in 2015 contrast CJFLCC-I and MoD’s early low level of trust and later high level of trust. Shortly after the IID transformed into CJFLCC-I, MoD launched the Tikrit offensive. The lack of coordination caught CJFLCC-I by surprise, and indeed the entire Coalition, and although CJFLCC-I was tracking MoD units, the event reduced the level of trust between MoD and their Coalition partners. Further, the extensive use of Shia militias, some with possible ties to Iran, stressed the trust between CJFLCC-I and MoD. One of the barriers to trust for the Iraqis was the Coalition’s time-frame. Iraqi leaders routinely engaged CJFLCC-I leaders on how long the Coalition would remain in Iraq.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to Tikrit, during the Ramadi counter-attack, MoD developed their plan in collaboration with CJFLCC-I and clearly outlined the role of Shia militias. Two of the reasons for the improved trust were the Iraqis’ increased confidence in CJFLCC-I and the strong personal relationship between the CJFLCC-I leaders and Iraqi leaders. CJFLCC-I earned the Iraqis’ increased confidence by routing DA’ISH (also known as ISIS and ISIL) from Tikrit with precision coalition-joint strike.<sup>14</sup> However, before it could do so, CJFLCC-I had to engage in extensive dialogue and collaboration with MoD so that all parties involved understood the disposition of friendly forces, so there would be no fratricide. The resulting successful operation built CJFLCC-I’s confidence in MoD’s ability to track friendly forces, and MoD’s confidence in CJFLCC-I’s ability to strike DA’ISH. The second reason for the trust developed between the two organizations was the strong relationships between the senior leaders – effective leaders build teams with partners through interpersonal relationships.<sup>15</sup> CJFLCC-I and Iraqi leaders engaged in many activities over time to build their interpersonal relationships. In addition to discussing the Iraqi’s needs and trying to provide enablers to make them successful, CJFLCC-I leaders constantly worked to build the Iraqi’s understanding of the Coalition’s commitment.<sup>16</sup> One instance that exemplified the positive relationship between CJFLCC-I and Iraqi leaders was the strong Iraqi attendance at and support for the CJFLCC-I Memorial Day ceremony.

Mutual trust was also lacking between Iraqi Jundi (soldiers) and their leaders. While ethnic and religious tensions certainly impacted trust between Iraqi leaders and the Jundi, one of the biggest inhibitors to trust is the endemic corruption amongst Iraqi leaders. Many Iraqi military leaders are appointed for political reliability rather than technical and tactical competence. Additionally, there is financial opportunity for

unscrupulous Iraqi military leaders to skim money from their Jundi, who are paid in cash. Other than pay day, many Iraqi leaders rarely spent time with their Jundi. This is a generational issue, since many Iraqi leaders are brought up in a military culture where they do not do Soldier tasks, and thus it must be unlearned over a couple generations.<sup>17</sup> This reduced trust since Soldiers expect the chain of command to share hardships and danger with them.<sup>18</sup> Another complication of the cash in person pay system is that each month the Jundi must transport their pay to geographically distant family, requiring extensive leave.<sup>19</sup> Initially, CJFLCC-I addressed the lack of trust between Jundi and their leaders by coaching Iraqi leaders at the Coalition's BPC sites to participate in training. CJFLCC-I cadre trained the leaders first so they would be confident and able to lead their Jundi. However, this approach could not overcome the cultural separation between Iraqi leaders and Jundi.

The combined arms breach solved this problem. After a few training iterations, CJFLCC-I added a combined arms breach as the capstone event for each rotation at a BPC site, and invited the Iraqi Prime Minister and a variety of senior Iraqi civilian and military officials to watch. The Iraqi units were told this at the beginning of the BPC rotation, and most became highly motivated, training hard with their Jundi and working diligently to secure additional resources for the combined arms breach to ensure their unit performed well in front of the Prime Minister.<sup>20</sup>

## **Shared Understanding**

Shared understanding, like mutual trust, is an important principle of mission command – in fact, it forms the basis for trust.<sup>21</sup> And like purpose and trust, CJFLCC-I initially struggled to create shared understanding with its Iraqi partners, Coalition partners and within the US military. One of the challenges was Iraqi combined operations between forces with different chains of command. Often Iraqi operations included Army units reporting to the MoD, Police units reporting to the Ministry of Interior, and militias who did not report to the government. A second challenge was allied nations who were running BPC sites had different mission command systems. Within the US military, maintaining shared understanding with SOJTF-I and 3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division was challenging because their Iraqi partners viewed operations differently than CJFLCC-I's partners. To address these challenges CJFLCC-I established Combined Operations Centers and embedded US units with Coalition partners.

CJFLCC-I established a Combined Operations Center with the Iraqis in Baghdad, one with the Kurds in Erbil, and partnered Coalition brigades and battalions with Iraqi area and division command posts.<sup>22</sup> This was important because the structure established relationships and guided interactions allowing the commander to exercise control.<sup>23</sup> The Combined Operations Centers not only tracked Iraqi units and other armed forces to create shared understanding, but also coached the Iraqis in mission command. They coached the Iraqis to establish a clear chain of command for each operation, so all participants, including militias reported to an Iraqi commander. Then CJFLCC-I facilitated Iraqi rehearsals, which helped the Iraqis refine their command and control of operations and further created shared understanding. This enabled the Iraqis to approve every operation, and every Coalition contribution to an operation, including every joint strike.<sup>24</sup>

Allied nations in the Coalition, such as Spain, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Germany, and Italy made significant contributions by running a BPC site. However, CJFLCC-I primarily used US mission command systems that were not interoperable with allied systems. To overcome this CJFLCC-I embedded equipment manned by US Soldiers with every Coalition partner so they could participate in routine activities by video teleconference and send and receive classified orders and information. To overcome this for future operations, every division should have a Coalition partner network, and the equipment to maintain that network, which is not on a US SECRET system. Then divisions must integrate this network into training, the way IID integrated US mission command systems into its daily operations prior to deployment.<sup>25</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The First Infantry Division encountered a host of mission command challenges on its no notice deployment to Iraq. However, it used purpose, mutual trust, and shared understanding to overcome these challenges. To achieve a common purpose, 1ID collaborated with the various US military commands, Iraqis, Kurds and allied nations. To build mutual trust 1ID developed close personal relationships and inspired the confidence of partners. To develop shared understanding 1ID built Combined Operations Centers and partnered with the Iraqis at the area and division level. The focus on purpose, mutual trust, and shared understanding allowed 1ID to successfully establish CJFLCC-I with 18 allied nations, build five BPC sites, train numerous Iraqi units, and conduct hundreds of Coalition-Joint strikes in support of Iraqi operations.

## Notes

1. Command Sergeant Major Michael A. Grinston, interview by John C. Lemay, 1 October 2015.
2. Major General Paul Funk, interview by John C. Lemay, 8 October 2015.
3. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 2. “The exercise of mission command is based on mutual trust, shared understanding, and purpose.”
4. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 1. “Through mission command, commanders initiate and integrate all functions and actions toward a common goal – mission accomplishment.”
5. Brett McGurk, *U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Iraq* (November 2013) <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/217546.htm> (accessed 15 September 2015).
6. Command Sergeant Major Michael A. Grinston, interview by John C. Lemay, 1 October 2015.
7. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 3. “Commanders use collaboration to establish human connections, build trust, and create and maintain shared understanding and purpose.”
8. Major General Paul Funk, interview by John C. Lemay, 8 October 2015.
9. Command Sergeant Major Michael A. Grinston, interview by John C. Lemay, 1 October 2015.
10. Major General Paul Funk, interview by John C. Lemay, 8 October 2015.
11. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 2. “The six principles of mission command are – Build cohesive teams through mutual trust...”
12. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 2. “Mutual trust is shared confidence among commanders, subordinates, and partners.”
13. Both Major General Funk and Command Sergeant Major Grinston remarked about how concerned the Iraqis are with the timeline of the Coalition’s commitment.
14. DA’ISH is a derogatory term for the Islamic State, ISIS or ISIL. Zeba Khan, *Words matter in ‘ISIS’ war, so use ‘Daesh,’* (9 October 2014). <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2014/10/09/words-matter-isis-war-use-daesh/V85GYEuasEEJgrUun0dMUP/story.html> (accessed 16 September 2015). “The term ‘Daesh’ is strategically a better choice because it is still accurate in that it spells out the acronym of the group’s full Arabic name, al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham. Yet, at the same time, ‘Daesh’ can also be understood as a play on words — and an insult. Depending on how it is conjugated in Arabic, it can mean anything from ‘to trample down and crush’ to ‘a bigot who imposes his view on others.’” CJFLCC-I spelled it DA’ISH. See also, Major General Paul Funk, interview by John C. Lemay, 8 October 2015.
15. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 3. “Effective commanders build teams within their own organizations and with unified action partners through interpersonal relationships.”
16. Major General Paul Funk, interview by John C. Lemay, 8 October 2015.
17. Command Sergeant Major Michael A. Grinston, interview by John C. Lemay, 1 October 2015.
18. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 3. “Soldiers expect to see the chain of command accomplish the mission while taking care of their welfare and sharing hardships and danger.”
19. Command Sergeant Major Michael A. Grinston, interview by John C. Lemay, 1 October 2015.
20. Command Sergeant Major Michael A. Grinston, interview by John C. Lemay, 1 October 2015.
21. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 3. “Shared understanding and purpose form the basis for unity of effort and trust.”
22. Iraqi area commands are the equivalent of corps – they command divisions. See also, Major General Paul Funk, interview by John C. Lemay, 8 October 2015.
23. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 9. “Organizational structure helps commanders exercise control. Structure refers to a defined organization that establishes relationships and guides interactions among elements.”
24. Major General Paul Funk, interview by John C. Lemay, 8 October 2015.
25. Command Sergeant Major Michael A. Grinston, interview by John C. Lemay, 1 October 2015.





# Chapter 7

## Mission Command In and Through Cyberspace: A Primer for Army Commanders

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Victor J. Delacruz

Joint force commanders exercise mission command across all domains to include land, air, maritime, space, and cyberspace. According to joint doctrine, mission command involves the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution, and this demands that leaders at all echelons exercise disciplined initiative to accomplish missions.<sup>1</sup> However, in the case of military operations in cyberspace, there are aspects of mission command that are not yet fully developed for the joint force.<sup>2</sup> For instance, the emphasis on delegation and decentralization are not always appropriate for situations involving the employment of national level cyberspace capabilities designed to create effects in support of unified action.<sup>3</sup> Army forces are currently incorporating cyberspace as an “operational domain,” and commanders understand how this effort has direct implications for their exercise of mission command in support of unified land operations.<sup>4</sup> In the absence of an operational example, past and current conditions on cyberspace integration will be discussed along with the mission command principle of creating shared understanding.

### Cyberspace in Retrospect

It is important to consider key events in recent history that have shaped how commanders currently exercise mission command in and through cyberspace. In 2009, national level discussions focusing on cyberspace gained remarkable momentum following the Cyberspace Policy Review, a comprehensive review to assess US policies and structures for cybersecurity.<sup>5</sup> The findings from the review led to the development of action plans to address shortfalls such as cybersecurity-related strategy, policy, and implementation.<sup>6</sup> These action plans guided the newly formed United States Cyber Command (USCYBERCOM). Figure 1 depicts

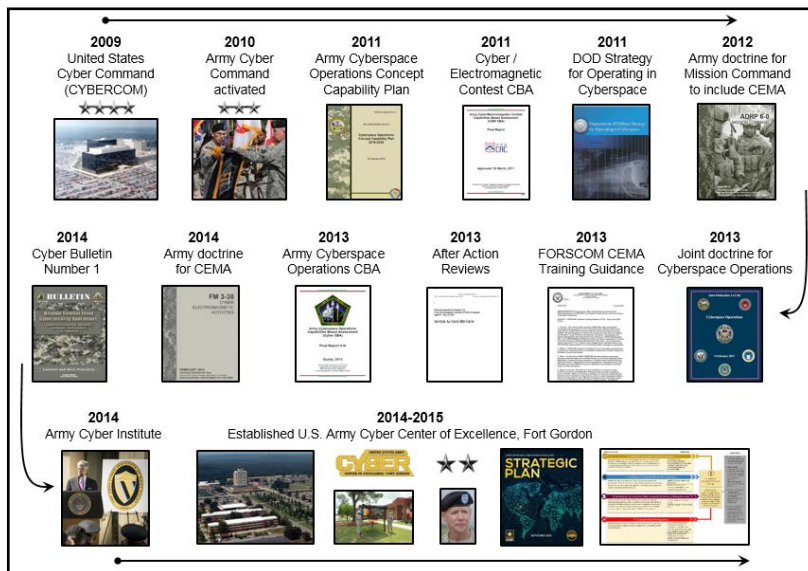


Figure 1. Key Events and Documents. Created by author.

a chronological flow of key joint and Army activities and published documents integral to the evolution of cyberspace operations.

In 2010, the US Army Cyber Command (ARCYBER) was established, and efforts were launched to expand research and development of cyberspace capabilities. In the following year the Army’s first concept capability plan was published and the term “cyber-electromagnetic” was coined to account for the overlap

between cyberspace and the electromagnetic spectrum.<sup>7</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Cyber/Electromagnetic Contest Capabilities Based Assessment was completed, which identified numerous capability gaps and recommended priority solution sets (material and non-material) for further development or acquisition as applicable.<sup>8</sup> Strategic policy and guidance continued to evolve and cyberspace was designated as an “operational domain” in the 2011 Department of Defense Strategy for Operating in Cyberspace.<sup>9</sup>

In 2012, the mission command warfighting function was formally codified in Army doctrine.<sup>10</sup> One of the primary mission command warfighting tasks included “Conduct cyber electromagnetic activities,” subsequently referred to as CEMA.<sup>11</sup> The Army broadly defined CEMA as, “Activities leveraged to seize, retain, and exploit an advantage over adversaries and enemies in both cyberspace and the electromagnetic spectrum, while simultaneously denying and degrading adversary and enemy use of the same and protecting the mission command system.”<sup>12</sup>

In 2013, Joint Publication (JP) 3-12, *Cyberspace Operations*, was published, and it established a taxonomy and supporting lexicon for cyberspace operations. With overarching strategic guidance in place and cyberspace doctrine available for implementation, US Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) developed and issued training guidance in this same year to guide Army forces as they incorporated cyberspace operations into their training plans and supporting training events.<sup>13</sup>

In 2014, Field Manual (FM) 3-38, *Cyber Electromagnetic Activities*, was published and specific to the exercise of mission command, this FM codified roles and responsibilities for commanders and staffs. Also, in 2014 the first *Cyber Bulletin* was published and it highlighted observations and emerging lessons learned over the most recent two years.<sup>14</sup> Finally, in 2014, the Army Cyber Institute opened at West Point, New York, and Fort Gordon, Georgia, was officially established as the US Army Cyber Center of Excellence. The events described above provide a sampling of activities that in various ways have shaped the conditions in which commanders and staffs currently exercise mission command.

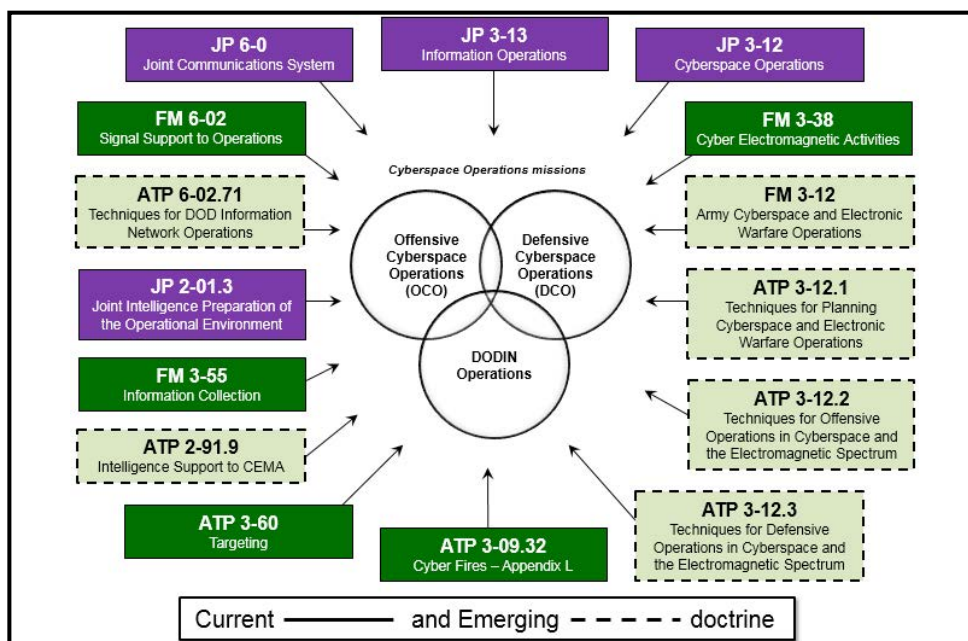


Figure 2. Current and emerging doctrine for cyberspace operations.<sup>15</sup> Created by author.

## On Cyberspace Doctrine

It is important to be aware of how doctrine is evolving and the impact this has on Army forces as they strive to operate in and through cyberspace. Cyberspace is defined in the joint community as “A global domain

within the information environment consisting of the interdependent network of information technology infrastructures and resident data, including the Internet, telecommunications networks, computer systems, and embedded processors and controllers.”<sup>16</sup> Although JP 3-12 defines and thoroughly describes cyberspace operations, it is necessary for Army commanders and staffs to read additional doctrinal publications to gain a more holistic perspective on how and where cyberspace operations can be implemented throughout the operations process. The JPs depicted on the preceding page in Figure 2 contain key information on cyberspace and cyberspace operations as promulgated by USCYBERCOM. The remaining Army publications represent current and emerging doctrine containing key tactics, techniques, and procedures addressing cyberspace operations.<sup>17</sup>

Collectively, current and emerging doctrine will guide commanders and staffs to more effectively lead and incorporate cyberspace operations into Army training and operations.<sup>18</sup> In particular, the draft FM 3-12, *Army Cyberspace and Electronic Warfare Operations*, currently in development, will provide detailed tactics and procedures for Army forces as they operate in and through cyberspace and the electromagnetic spectrum. The joint and Army doctrine previewed above represent a sampling of sources in continual development which inform the exercise of mission command in various ways.

### Commander’s Role in Exercising Mission Command

With an appreciation of historical events and an awareness of a rapidly growing body of knowledge on cyberspace operations, Army commanders are able to assess their unique conditions and develop approaches to more effectively plan, coordinate, synchronize, integrate, and conduct cyberspace operations. Currently, commanders are having difficulty integrating cyberspace operations in support of their scheme of maneuver and overarching concept of operations. To varying degrees, they lack the personnel, equipment, and tactics, techniques, and procedures to conduct cyberspace operations.<sup>19</sup> The Army continues to identify and address these shortcomings through a concerted effort between the Cyber Center of Excellence, Army Cyber Command, and Army Cyber Institute.<sup>20</sup>

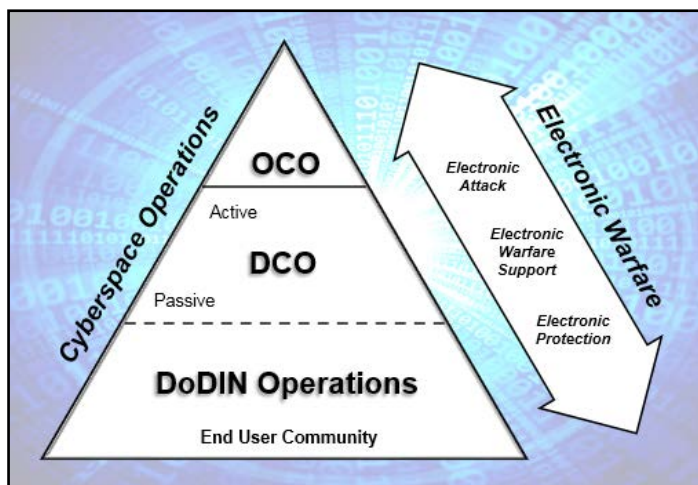


Figure 3. Cyberspace Operations and Electronic Warfare. Created by author.

Cyberspace operations are described as missions in cyberspace and they include offensive cyberspace operations (OCO), defensive cyberspace operations (DCO), and DoD information network operations (DoDIN operations). Depending upon the situation, these operations and associated capabilities may be combined with electronic warfare (EW), signal, information operations (IO), space operations, and intelligence to employ primarily nonlethal actions to create desired effects in and through cyberspace.<sup>21</sup> Figure 3 depicts

the relationship between cyberspace operations and EW. The divisions of EW are depicted to provide a conceptual alignment of tasks.<sup>22</sup>

Although commanders are limited in their ability to exercise mission command in and through cyberspace, they realize they have a key role in leading this effort. For instance, observations and emerging trends to date indicate that commanders are becoming increasingly involved in the planning process for cyberspace operations and their staffs rely upon them to address four focus areas. Specifically, commanders:

- Provide a clear commander’s intent and accompanying guidance for cyberspace operations to inform staff and subordinate actions throughout the operations process.
- Ensure active collaboration across the staff, with subordinate units, with higher headquarters, and with unified action partners to enable shared understanding of cyberspace and the associated opportunities and risks to military operations.
- Approve high-priority target lists, target nominations, collection priorities, and risk mitigation measures which reflect their visualization, description, and direction specific to cyberspace operations.
- Create massed effects by synchronizing the employment of cyberspace operations with lethal and other nonlethal actions (e.g., Fires and IO) in support of the concept of operations; anticipate and account for related second and third-order effects.<sup>23</sup>

The focus areas above illustrate the key role of commanders as they drive the operations process (i.e., plan, prepare, execute, and assess) and enable their staffs to conduct cyber electromagnetic activities.<sup>24</sup> These efforts will continue to confront obstacles and further require commanders and their staffs to demonstrate disciplined initiative to accomplish tasks involving cyberspace operations in support of unified land operations.<sup>25</sup>



Figure 4. Sample of Cyberspace Situational Awareness. Created by author.

## Creating Shared Understanding

For effective integration of cyberspace operations, commanders apply the principle of mission command involving the imperative to create shared understanding.<sup>26</sup> Shared understanding requires command-

ers and staffs to engage in continual collaboration as they employ forces in a congested and contested operational environment. They collaborate to ensure their portion of the DODIN is secured and defended, while at the same time they gain and maintain situational awareness of enemy and adversary cyberspace activities.

While the incorporation of cyberspace operations into Army thought and action draws from the other principles of mission command (i.e., build cohesive teams through mutual trust, provide a clear commander's intent, exercise disciplined initiative, use mission orders, and accept prudent risk), the holistic nature of cyberspace operations demands the creation of shared understanding which involves intense coordination, synchronization and collaboration.<sup>27</sup> Key to developing shared understanding, which in turn contributes to situational understanding of the operational environment, is the imperative to achieve cyberspace situational awareness.<sup>28</sup> Figure 4 depicts various elements that are considered in regards to cyberspace situational awareness.

Commanders and staffs create and maintain shared understanding in several ways. Internally, they ensure that battle rhythm events incorporate reviews of cyberspace operations in order to promote situational awareness and achieve unity of effort through collaboration. These battle rhythm events include not only planning events (e.g., Army design methodology sessions and the Military Decision-Making Process) but also briefings (e.g., update and assessment), meetings (e.g., operations synchronization), and working groups (e.g., targeting, CEMA and IO). Externally, commanders empower their staffs to collaborate with higher headquarters counterparts and unified action partners.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, commanders and staffs strive to gain and maintain situational awareness of cyberspace which informs their overall situational understanding of the operational environment.

## **Implications and Conclusion**

There are several direct implications for commanders and staffs as they seek to more effectively integrate cyberspace operations. First, they should embrace cyberspace as an operational domain and understand how this contributes to the Army's focus and indeed reliance upon cross-domain operations.<sup>30</sup> Second, they should emphasize the importance of cyberspace operations as they drive or otherwise conduct the operations process in training settings and in combat operations. For instance, creating shared understanding of cyberspace is an essential aspect of mission command enabled by the DODIN which implies that commanders must ensure their portion of the DODIN is continuously operated and defended.<sup>31</sup> Third, they should establish reading programs to ensure their Soldiers are reading and implementing published doctrine as previewed in this writing. Additionally, they should expand their reading programs to include professional journals and other forms of joint and Army media addressing cyberspace and cyberspace operations. The Army Training Network and Cyber Center of Excellence Lessons and Best Practices websites maintain an abundance of tools for immediate download and use.<sup>32</sup>

Commanders and their staffs will continue to incorporate cyberspace operations into their training and operations despite numerous shortfalls. In the near future, many of these shortfalls will be addressed as a result of efforts by the US Army Cyber Center of Excellence, the organization responsible for advancing "cyber, signal, and EW" in the domains of doctrine, organization, training, material, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTmLPP-P).<sup>33</sup> During the interim, commanders will exercise mission command by driving the operations process and leading the conduct of CEMA, while ensuring that cyberspace operations are incorporated into organizational-wide thought and action.



## Notes

1. Mission command defined as “The conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based upon mission-type orders.” US Department of Defense, JP 3-31, *Command and Control for Joint Land Operations*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), IV-8. Army doctrine provides additional context for the *decentralization* aspect of mission command. Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, (Washington: GPO, 2012). See also, US Department of Defense, JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), II-2.
2. “It is important to note that while mission command is the preferred command philosophy, it is not appropriate to all situations. Certain activities require more detailed control, such as the employment of nuclear weapons or other national capabilities, air traffic control, or activities that are fundamentally about the efficient synchronization of resources.” US Department of Defense, *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Force 2020*, (Washington: GPO, 2012), 5.
3. US Department of Defense, *Capstone*, 5.
4. “Strategic Initiative 1: DoD will treat cyberspace as an operational domain to organize, train, and equip so that DoD can take full advantage of cyberspace’s potential.” US Department of Defense, *DOD Strategy for Operating in Cyberspace*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 5. See also, “Commanders conduct CO [cyberspace operations] to retain freedom of maneuver in cyberspace, accomplish the JFC’s [joint force commander] objectives, deny freedom of action to adversaries, and enable other operational activities.” US Department of Defense, JP 3-12 (R) *Cyberspace Operations*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 5.
5. US Executive Office of the President, *Cyberspace Policy Review: Assuring a Trusted and Resilient Information and Communications Infrastructure* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2009).
6. US Executive Office of the President, *Cyberspace Policy Review*, 38.
7. Department of the Army, TRADOC PAM 525-7-8, *The United States Army’s Cyberspace Operations Concept Capability Plan 2016-2028* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), iv.
8. Malcolm Martin, Personal interview, 29 June 2012. Regarding source - Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Army Cyber/Electromagnetic (C/EM) Contest Capabilities-Based Assessment (CBA) Final Report*, (Fort Meade, MD: 2011).
9. US Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Strategy for Operating in Cyberspace*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2011), 5.
10. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, 1-1.
11. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, 1-4. CEMA acronym used for the first time in Army doctrine. Source - Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 3-38, *Cyber Electromagnetic Activities*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 1-1.
12. Department of the Army, ADRP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-5.
13. United States Army Forces Command, *FORSCOM Command Training Guidance (CTG) – Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14)* (Memorandum dated 12 June 2013)
14. Bruce Adams, Personal interview 12 June 2014. Regarding source – Center for Army Lessons Learned, *Brigade Combat Team Cybersecurity Operations: Trends, Lessons Learned, and Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures, Cyber Bulletin No. 1* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: 2014).
15. Christopher Walls, Personal interview, 20 November 2015. Reflects proposed/pre-decisional Army Techniques Publications (ATP) way ahead.
16. Department of the Army, JP 3-12, GL-4.
17. Christopher Walls, Personal interview, 13 October 2015, regarding a discussion on the proposed doctrine way ahead for cyberspace operations.
18. Victor Delacruz, “Enabling Army Commanders to More Effectively Integrate Cyberspace Operations,” *Cyber Compendium: Cyberspace Professional Continuing Education Course Papers* (Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, OH: 2015), 110-118.
19. Ricardo San Miguel, Personal interview, 18 October 2015.
20. Stephen Fogarty, *United States Army Cyber Center of Excellence Strategic Plan* (Fort Gordon, GA: 2015).
21. Mike Scully, Personal interview 8 November 2013. Regarding a discussion on the Army’s use of lethal and nonlethal actions as promulgated in doctrine. See also the 2014 *Army Operating Concept*, 22. “The Army as part of

the joint team conducts cyberspace operations combined with other nonlethal operations (such as electronic warfare, electromagnetic spectrum operations, and military information support) as well as lethal actions.”

22. EA represents electronic attack, ES represents electronic warfare support, and EP represents electronic protection IAW JP 3-13.1, *Electronic Warfare*.

23. L. D. Holder, Personal interview, 5 July 2015. Building from the emphasis on combined arms maneuver, it is essential to consider cyberspace operations in the context of combat power as promulgated in ADRP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, 2011, 3-1.

24. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, 3-3.

25. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-4.

26. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-2.

27. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-1 to 2-5.

28. Department of the Army, JP 3-12, IV-5

29. Department of the Army, ADRP 3-0, 1-3. “Unified action partners are those military forces governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and elements of the private sector with whom Army forces plan, coordinate, synchronize, and integrate during the conduct of operations.”

30. Department of the Army, TRADOC PAM 525-3-1, *The United States Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World, 2020-2040* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), iv.

31. Fogarty, *United States Army Cyber Center of Excellence Strategic Plan*, 2.

32. Army Training Network, Army Cyberspace Operations and Cyber Electromagnetic Activities URL: [https://atn.army.mil/dsp\\_template.aspx?dpID=460](https://atn.army.mil/dsp_template.aspx?dpID=460); Cyber CoE Lessons and Best Practices URL: <https://lwn.army.mil/web/cll/home>; See also “What’s Hot” and “Training Bulletin Board” on the ATN base page.

33. Fogarty, *United States Army Cyber Center of Excellence Strategic Plan*, 5. “Priorities and Objectives: The Cyber CoE is the US Army’s force modernization proponent for cyberspace operations, signal/communications networks and information services, spectrum operations, and EW. As such, it is responsible for developing the underlying concepts and refining processes for identifying, training, educating, and developing world-class, highly-skilled professionals supporting strategic, operational and tactical cyberspace, signal, and EW operations.”





## Chapter 8

# Mission Command and Complexity on the Battlefield

Dr. Dan G. Cox

Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 6-0 specifically states that mission command is designed to address complex operational challenges, but it does not explain how this will be accomplished or why mission command is better suited for this task. This chapter is aimed at filling this void and connecting mission command with some of the relevant complexity theory. The main assertion arising from this research is that mission command is, at its heart, the ability to centralize and decentralize a military organization in order to exploit opportunities in the operating environment. This chapter will also briefly explore the historical foundations of mission command.

### **The Theoretical Foundations of Mission Command**

Before we delve into how mission command addresses modern warfare complexity, a brief overview of some of the more important historical antecedents to mission command will be explored. Mission command as a phrase may be relatively new, but much of the foundational thinking underlying the concept is hundreds of years old. General Helmuth von Moltke was one of the first military theorists to realize the necessity of pushing initiative down the chain of command. Moltke famously stated, “No plan of operations extends with any certainty beyond the first contact with the main hostile force.”<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, Carl von Clausewitz argued that uncertainty and the “fog of war” are permanent features every military commander has to address.<sup>2</sup> The mission command concept builds on this, noting “successful commanders understand they cannot provide guidance or direction for all conceivable contingencies.”<sup>3</sup>

Moltke also posited that moving large, modern armies in his time required independent leaders of all ranks who were “accustomed to independent action.” Moltke went on to argue “subordinate commanders will understand how to act in the war according to the wishes of the superior commander, even when the latter cannot expressly state his will because of time and conditions.”<sup>4</sup> This certainly seems like a strong historical antecedent to the mission command tenet of disciplined initiative or “action in the absence of orders, when existing orders no longer fit the situation, or when unforeseen opportunities or threats arise.”<sup>5</sup> Still, Moltke was referring to a very narrow definition of mission command that primarily related to movement, and he clearly favored tactical prowess over linking tactical actions in time, space, and purpose to meet a strategic objective. Moltke shortsightedly argued that “in the face of a tactical victory all other considerations recede into the background.”<sup>6</sup> So while Moltke’s and Clausewitz’s thinking served as a basis for which mission command is derived, mission command is a far deeper concept than either envisioned.

Moltke also emphasized initiative understanding both the fog of war and the need for action. He argued, “In doubtful cases and in unclear conditions (which occur so often in war), it will generally be more advisable to proceed actively and keep the initiative than to await the law of the opponent.”<sup>7</sup> Clausewitz’s discussion of boldness also hinted at the need for some prudent initiative to be enacted by lower-level commanders. Clausewitz observed that “whenever boldness encounters timidity, it is likely to be proven the winner, because timidity in itself implies a loss of equilibrium.”<sup>8</sup> This is more colorfully and forcefully captured by a quotation from General George Patton who said, “A good plan, violently executed now, is better than a perfect plan next week.”<sup>9</sup>

One could be left with the impression at this point that the antecedents for mission command are foreign in nature but nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, US Army Field Service Regulations from 1914 states:

Field orders are brief; short sentences are easily understood; conjectures, expectations, reasons for measures adopted, and detailed instructions for a variety of possible events, do not inspire confidence,

and should be avoided. . . An order should not trespass upon the province of a subordinate. It should contain everything beyond the independent authority of the subordinate but nothing more.<sup>10</sup>

While this is certainly not a perfect encapsulation of the modern mission command concept, the emphasis on brevity and latitude in order generation are certainly important antecedents. Perhaps of more importance is the emphasis on not infringing on the “province” of subordinates, indicating that commanders guide but should not seek to directly control subordinates.

While a firm foundation for the mission command philosophy can be found in the works of Clausewitz, Moltke, and even in early American doctrine, none of these theorists or sources completely captured what mission command means today. Still, the foundation drawn from these theorists should not be overlooked. The key lesson from all of this is that commanders must realize direct control of complex human situations is unobtainable. Mission command allows commanders the ability to better adapt to a rapidly changing operating environment and the adaptive enemies contained within than attempts at direct, hierarchical control offer.

### **Mission Command and Complexity**

Mission command can be a fantastic tool for dealing with complexity on the modern battlefield. Complexity is often equated with systems, but systems only tell part of the story. Theorists and practitioners who focus solely on systems or, worse still, pieces of systems, often become narrowly focused on nodal approaches and solutions for dealing with complex military problems. Targeting and removing key leaders becomes the sole focus of operations at the expense of dealing with the true complexities, propensities, and opportunities the operating environment may be offering.

Complexity, more properly considered, deals with systems, their emergent properties, adaptations, interactions, structures, and processes. Complexity is also better understood through the degree of centralization or distribution of the major actors in an operating environment. With the need to understand and react quickly to an ever-changing, adaptive enemy and operating environment, comes the necessity of a mission command approach.

Mission command is a construct based on the recognition of the complexity of social structures that military leadership has to occur within and outside of a leader’s direct chain of command. Consider counterinsurgency operations and all of the necessary leadership that occurs outside of an American military officer’s purview. First, these operations almost always occur in foreign states, and because there are no examples of successful counterinsurgency campaigns by an external supporter without at least some support from the local population, influencing locals becomes a key to success. Commanders need to develop good relationships with local leaders and military leader counterparts, but none of these players are likely to be in a commander’s direct chain of command.

Consider further that a division commander could not possibly circulate the battlefield frequently enough to develop deep relationships with all of the key leaders in his or her area of operations. This situation alone demands at least some devolution of initiative to junior officers to develop these relationships and act prudently, in the absence of orders in certain cases, to solidify or preserve them.

Still, this only represents a small portion of the seas of humanity a division commander will have to successfully navigate and influence. Mission command also recognizes American interagency organizations and international organizations that will likely be operating within the state.<sup>11</sup> None of these organizations will fall under the chain of command, yet they may prove integral to the success of operations. For example, if a commander is keen to develop the local agriculture in a particular area, the US Agency for International Development could prove an important ally.

The commander is operating in a human domain and, therefore, an open system. Open systems can more easily mutate and open organizations more easily adapt. Ori Brafman expands on this thought, asserting that decentralized organizations are more likely to embrace adaptation in open systems than centralized

systems.<sup>12</sup> This sentiment is echoed throughout the complexity literature and it has been further expanded on recently in Nassim Taleb's book *Antifragile*. Taleb came up with the original concept of antifragility as a rebuttal to complexity theorists who argued that strong systems were more robust than weak systems. Robust organizations are able, for a time, to absorb the attacks against them, but because no one can predict the future with certainty, these organizations become overconfident and fail to adapt and improve, hence becoming prone to catastrophic events. Taleb argues for a new type of organization that is antifragile. Instead of attempting to protect your organization from attack, antifragile organizations figure out a way to gain, adapt, and improve from stress. Taleb argued that "anything that has more upside than downside from random events (or certain shocks) is antifragile."<sup>13</sup>

Fragile organizations are generally massive, hierarchical bureaucracies and states which, ironically, appear strongest right before collapse. Many examples exist, but Kodak Corporation and the Mubarak regime in Egypt are two of the starkest examples of this phenomenon. Both Kodak and President Mubarak were able, for decades, to fight off competition, but it was perhaps due to their success that they eventually went through a phase where they were not tested and falsely believed they were invincible. Because they went through a prolonged phase devoid of shocks, these organizations became maladaptive, centralized, and hierarchical. When a major shock did occur, they were unable to react and adapt. Following the tenets of Taleb's antifragile thesis, the setbacks and hardships the US Army has endured since 2001 have caused a new flurry of innovation which might not have occurred had both OIF and OEF been inarguable, complete, and easy success cases. Chief among these innovations is mission command.

Mission command deals at least partially with the problems of fragility identified by Taleb and centralization identified by Brafman. As mission command pushes prudent initiative below the senior commander, the organization becomes less hierarchical, and more importantly, less rigid. Command is less centralized and adaptations can now occur more quickly, with more variance in tune with local social contexts, and at differing speeds.

Perhaps it is more accurate to state that mission command has the potential to be less centralized. Centralized command should not be thought of as a necessarily unproductive form of command, and mission command is nuanced enough to recognize this. There are times when higher-level commanders need to be able to make quick decisions and give direct orders to seize or maintain the initiative and further develop a continuing advantage over the enemy. Ori Brafman argued that one of the best strategies for fighting a decentralized adversary is to decentralize your organization.<sup>14</sup> However, mission command comes to a different conclusion in a way melding what Brafman and Taleb argue. A mission command organization has the *potential* to decentralize. In fact, what mission command gives a commander is the ability to rapidly centralize or decentralize leadership and initiative based on the complexity of the environment and what the environment and enemies are offering the commander. ADP 6-0 hints at this, arguing "a key aspect of mission command is determining the appropriate degree of control to impose on subordinates."<sup>15</sup> If one takes John Boyd's work on decision loops seriously, mission command is a great tool for getting inside the enemy's decision loop and seizing the advantage.<sup>16</sup>

Brafman also argues that in open systems, "information and knowledge naturally filter in at the edges, closer to where the action is."<sup>17</sup> If this is true, then mission command is well-suited for gathering information at the edges of an open system. By delegating initiative to lower-level commanders, the senior commander necessarily has to stay in closer contact with his subordinates, building a deep trust relationship with these individuals. This allows lower-level commanders the freedom to collect vital information from the open system and filter that information up the chain of command.

It is often stated that higher-level commanders need to see the whole picture, and the higher one goes up the chain of command, the broader the picture they must consider. This is true, but it is only part of the complexity story. Commanders need to be able to correctly identify emergent propensities the environment and/or the enemy are offering that can be turned into an advantage for his/her organization. Emergence is

defined by Yaneer Bar-Yam as the relationship between the details and the larger view.<sup>18</sup> Bar-Yam uses the classic metaphor of the forest and the trees to explain this phenomenon. He argues that the trees, animals, plants, water features, etc. of a forest comprise the smaller-scale view, while a panoramic picture of the forest entails the larger view. One cannot see the details of an individual deer from the panoramic perspective nor the whole forest from the image of a single deer or tree. More importantly, emergence is about identifying the important relationships between individual trees, deer, and the larger environment. Mission command allows a commander to do this. Without mission command a commander might be stuck with the larger view and whatever random details he/she can gather. However, by pushing disciplined initiative downward, lower-level commanders will have the opportunity to interact with the smaller-scale environment more often and relay findings of key variables back up the chain of command, which should help a commander identify important emergent properties in the operating environment. ADP 6-0 sums up the importance of the preceding argument thusly: “Commanders make and implement decisions based on information. Information imparts structure and shape to military operations. It fuels understanding and fosters initiative.”<sup>19</sup> Without pushing initiative down to lower levels, understanding of the operating environment and the enemy by higher-level commanders is unlikely.

A better understanding of the environment and the enemy is only part of what mission command brings toward ordering complexity on the battlefield. Mission command allows for the potential of rapid micro-adaptations to occur in variance with what the local operating environment is offering. This takes the form of disciplined initiative which allows subordinate commanders the opportunity to exploit opportunities in an effort to seize, maintain, or advance the initiative.

Stathis Kalyvas makes a convincing argument in his study of civil war/insurgency that a great deal of the violence has local causes. He argues that “civil war often transforms local and personal grievances into violence.”<sup>20</sup> Further, Kalyvas laments that scholars and practitioners tend to focus on the macrolevel and overgeneralize instead of striving to understand the complexity and nuanced differences the local level presents. Kalyvas argues:

The current emphasis on the macrolevel implies that “on the ground” dynamics are perceived as a rather irrelevant local manifestation of the macrolevel. Local actors are seen as local replicas of central actors, and studying them is justified only on the grounds of local history or antiquarian interest.<sup>21</sup>

The key problem for Kalyvas is that counterinsurgents have the ability to use selective or indiscriminate violence. Local nuances and the degree of control exercised by the counterinsurgents often demands selective violence, but because the central government and external supporters often overgeneralize from the macro-level, indiscriminate violence is often used.<sup>22</sup> Mission command allows for the correction of this overgeneralization, as subordinate commanders can see the local grievances with more clarity and allow the commander or, in the absence of orders, the subordinate commander, the ability to use selective violence where appropriate. Kalyvas emphasizes that selective violence can only be used successfully if the counterinsurgent has the ability to “collect fine-grained information.”<sup>23</sup> This fact, more than most, demands the adoption of some sort of mission command model and the devolution of command through disciplined initiative, as it is implausible that higher-level commanders will even have the time to develop this fine-grained information on their own or, perhaps, act on such information in a timely fashion.

Disciplined initiative allows for micro-experimentation as well. Numerous complexity theorists have argued that trial and error is an excellent approach toward addressing complexity. Nassim Taleb summarizes why by arguing:

The random element in trial and error is not quite random, if it is carried out rationally, using error as a source of information. If every trial provides you with information about what *does not* [italics in original] work, you start zooming in on a solution—so every attempt becomes more valuable, more like an expense than an error. And of course you make discoveries along the way.<sup>24</sup>

Disciplined initiative allows for just this type of inventive probing of the environment that is necessary to successfully link tactical actions in time, space, and purpose in support of a strategic end state. It also helps to determine what might work at a given point in time in a local area and to gain useful information necessary for successful operations.

In many ways, mission command is an attempt to avoid the trap of extreme risk aversion. Interestingly, Clausewitz argued that risk aversion can grow greater the higher one travels through the ranks. He lamented that many great junior officers became mediocre generals lacking the boldness necessary to lead effectively.<sup>25</sup> Mission command combats this gradual slide toward mediocrity by forcing senior leaders to accept prudent risk through managing the initiative of lower-level officers.

## **Conclusion**

Mission command is not an absolution of leadership. In fact, mission command demands more from leaders in several ways. First, mission command will only work if solid trust relationships are established and maintained with subordinates, and this requires great effort. Second, the commander must learn how to successfully influence those for which he/she has no direct control. Finally, commanders must learn how to use new information gained by subordinates and how to craft orders that allow subordinates to exercise disciplined initiative.

In the final analysis, mission command is an excellent way to organize, probe, analyze, and act in a complex environment. Mission command recognizes the breadth of leadership and that commanders will have to influence those outside their chain of command. It also allows for better trust relationships to be built between senior and junior commanders. As local differences exist, it protects against overgeneralizing macro-level characteristics to the local level and allows for information to be gathered around the edges of the system, allowing for a better understanding of the operating environment. Mission command allows for micro-adaptations and differences in responses between locales. It also will begin to filter strategic understanding down the ranks as commanders are informed one to two levels up, and they will have to disseminate their understanding below to subordinates which will likely filter strategic thinking one to two levels down. Perhaps the filtering of strategic and operational thinking downward will save us from weepy and poorly written diatribes like Emile Simpson's *War From the Ground Up* as battalion, brigade, and division commanders build trust relationships and shared understanding with senior leaders and subordinates through mission command.

One has to worry that as good as the mission command concept is, it will all come crashing down at the first case of a junior officer exercising disciplined initiative that does not result in what can be immediately determined a beneficial outcome. Clausewitz has a warning against such a kneejerk reaction to operations that were well-conceived but fail to produce exactly the results anticipated. Clausewitz argued "happy the army where ill-timed boldness occurs frequently; it is a luxuriant weed, but indicates the richness of the soil."<sup>26</sup> One can only hope that mission command is allowed the latitude to develop a rich soil from which prudent initiative can grow.

## Notes

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2. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, editors and translators, *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 119 and 193.
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4. Hughes, *Moltke on the Art of War*, 133.
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6. Hughes, *Moltke on the Art of War*, xx.
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8. Howard and Paret, *On War*, 190.
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21. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 390.
22. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 274.
23. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 173.
24. Taleb, *Antifragile*, 71.
25. Paret, *On War*, 191-192.
26. Paret, *On War*, 190.

## Chapter 9

### The Brčko Bridge Riot: Mission Command in the Midst of Ethnic Strife

Kendall D. Gott

In the summer of 1997, there was a potentially explosive event in the small city of Brčko that could have resulted in the heavy loss of American lives and disrupted a contentious peace process in the Balkans. Mission command was not yet a formalized concept within the US Army, but this event displayed and tested the principles that would come to form the foundation of mission command doctrine a decade later. In Brčko, a small US Army unit found itself out of communication with its higher headquarters and facing hundreds of enraged protesters intent on violence. At the end of the day this unit was able to defend itself without the loss of life to either side, and prevent an international incident that could have derailed the peace process.

After Yugoslavia disintegrated in 1992, the collapse of the political order led to chaos and violence between the ethnic groups that had made up Yugoslav society. Humanitarian outrages became all too common. For example, in 1992 in Brčko, Serbian militias slayed approximately 3,000 Bosniaks, a Slavic ethnic group with a Muslim identity living in Bosnia. A similar atrocity occurred in nearby Srebrenica, which resulted in at least another 8,000 Bosniak deaths.<sup>1</sup> By 1995, the independent states of Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina had formed, but there was still widespread ethnic cleansing as Serbs in Bosnia sought to consolidate their gains, and spread their control further. With clear memories of the Holocaust in mind, a coalition of nations under the leadership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) sent humanitarian aid and military forces to help stabilize the region. High-level mediators attempted to resolve the ongoing conflict in former Yugoslavia and produced the 1995 Dayton Accords, which laid the framework towards that end. Meanwhile, a twisted web of political factions in Bosnia threatened to reignite the civil war in earnest that might “spill over” into neighboring countries.

Implementation of the accords required a military show of force that would deter active Serbian violence and promote cooperation. US Army units were quickly deployed into Bosnia for this dangerous mission with little time to prepare and train. Soldiers faced tense encounters with well-armed militias as well as organized and occasionally violent groups of protesters bent on ethnic cleansing and preventing the implementation of the Dayton Accords. The Brčko Bridge Riot in 1997 is a prime example of a case in which the principles of mission command played a decisive role in restoring stability and preserving military and civilian lives.

The Implementation Force (IFOR) sent into Bosnia in 1995 to enact the peace accords was formed from NATO military forces and deployed throughout Bosnia in various camps and outposts. Its mission to deter hostilities and assist the implementation of civil organizations, if successful, would make great progress in establishing a lasting peace. Although a noble cause, the mission was beyond what the US Army typically trained and prepared for. Instead of conducting conventional combat operations, US Soldiers sent into Bosnia were required to learn new skills and methods with little time and inadequate equipment. Training for peacekeeping missions, especially those that involved dealing with civil disturbances such as riots, was usually sparse and conducted hastily. Even basic crowd control equipment such as batons and shields were not available for issue. US Soldiers in Bosnia generally lacked any deep understanding of how to meet verbal abuse and violence with restraint.<sup>2</sup>

The direct cause of the 1997 Brčko Riot was the rivalry between two Serbian leaders vying for power under the terms of the Dayton accords. Biljana Plavsic had become the president of the Serbian Republika Srpska, but was challenged by Radovan Karadzic, the former president and indicted war criminal who sought to undermine her at every chance. Karadzic’s supporters showed their rejection of the Dayton Accords with civil unrest that was increasingly violent and bloody. Demonstrations materialized wherever Plavsic attempted to enforce the accords.<sup>3</sup> NATO was committed to supporting Plavsic, and when General

Eric Shinseki became the commanding general of Stabilization Force (SFOR) in Bosnia in July 1997, he set about providing active support to the civilian authorities and restructuring the local police forces. With this NATO backing, Plavsic planned to gain control of all the police stations across Bosnia and appointed loyal supporters as the new chiefs of police.<sup>4</sup> Within days of his appointment, Shinseki ordered Major General David Grange, the commander of Multinational Division North (MND-N), to help the few police units loyal to Plavsic gain control of the police station in Brčko. US Army forces would back up this effort with a show of force. Serb hard-liners loyal to Karadzic learned of this development and prepared a hostile response.

The city of Brčko is located in the 30-mile long Posavina Corridor, linking Serb-controlled enclaves in eastern and western Bosnia. Situated on the Sava River, it was directly on the volatile border with Croatia. Before the war the city contained about 41,000 inhabitants, but ethnic cleansing had removed most of the non-Serbian people. The 1992 massacre was a fresh memory. This strategic city and the corridor were so contentious to all three factions that the negotiators at Dayton had not managed to attain a final determination on their status. There was hope one would be reached within a year, but at this time various factions vied for control of Brčko and were willing to use violent riots for political purposes.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 1. Bosnia and Herzegovina. Created by author.

The US Army was about to be put into a very difficult situation in this part of Bosnia. Because of the lack of training and riot equipment – as well as for political reasons – the US commanders planned to rely on local police forces to counter civil disturbances. However, local police were not always reliable. Many times the police – out of sympathy or fear – hesitated to strongly confront angry crowds. Many of the policemen were resentful of the NATO presence and the installment of new chiefs of police. They not surprisingly welcomed any crowds demonstrating on their behalf. As a result, US Soldiers would confront large organized and coordinated civil disturbances without the support of the police.<sup>6</sup> The major riot that erupted in Brčko in August 1997 would quickly escalate beyond the means of the loyal police to control and elements of the US Army responded to stabilize the situation.

The mission to support the police forces loyal to Plavsic in the cities of Brčko and nearby Bijeljina was assigned to Lieutenant Colonel James Greer, commander of the 1st Battalion, 77th Armor. He planned to



begin his operations on 28 August and decided to focus on the city Bijeljina first. Bijeljina had a population of about 37,000 and before the wars had a Muslim majority. The city had seen much ethnic cleansing over the past several years. This resulted in creating a Serbian-dominated enclave, with very few Muslims left.<sup>7</sup> For this operation, Lieutenant Colonel Greer expected that there would be Serbian opposition and deployed an M1 tank company, two mechanized infantry companies, and an engineer company. This force packed a great deal of combat power.

Understanding the goal of preventing violence, Greer decided to use his initiative, a key principle in mission command, to employ this tailored unit to the task at hand. It was powerful enough to prevent a serious military challenge to its mission or to be blocked for any time by obstacles. In the early morning hours this force quickly established checkpoints around the city to prevent the entry of any demonstrators from other locales.<sup>8</sup> With the city surrounded, Lieutenant Colonel Greer led a small group to escort and assist the new loyal police officials in gaining control of the police headquarters. Unfortunately the Serbs knew of the operation and by 0800, 500 or more demonstrators formed barricades around the police headquarters. Acting again on his own initiative, Greer quickly dispatched a company of infantry in Bradley fighting vehicles to secure the building so that the mission could continue. However, the crowd proved too large and violent and the Americans decided to turn back. Lieutenant Colonel Greer ultimately decided to end the operation and withdrew from the city.<sup>9</sup>

Stymied at Bijeljina, Lieutenant Colonel Greer decided to go to Brčko after he heard that unrest was breaking out in that town. However, demonstrators blocked the road a short distance from town, forcing the American column to halt. Instead of forcing or negotiating his way through to the city, Lieutenant Colonel Greer was unable to negotiate passage and decided not to force the issue. Instead he returned to Camp McGovern, located a few miles outside of Brčko, to monitor and assess events along with Major General Grange.<sup>10</sup>

Brčko had meanwhile exploded in violence. Greer had given responsibility for supporting the loyal police inside the city of Brčko to Captain Kevin D. Hendricks, who commanded Delta Company of the 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry Regiment. For this operation his company was reinforced by a mechanized infantry platoon from the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment and two military police platoons. A quick reaction force was formed using an additional infantry platoon from nearby Camp Colt. This force totaled approximately 140 personnel. Captain Hendricks' mission orders lacked many details such as the identity of the loyal Serb police officer in charge in Brčko. Because Lieutenant Colonel Greer had explained the general objectives of the mission to him, thereby creating between them a high degree of what mission command doctrine calls shared understanding, the end state of the mission was clear. Simply put, he was to ensure that policemen loyal to Plavsic secured control of the police headquarters during the midnight shift. Hendricks planned to do this by deploying a blocking force around the building.<sup>11</sup> His forces only intended to prevent demonstrators from interfering with the loyal police officers.

In retrospect, Captain Hendricks had prepared his own company for this situation well. In the weeks prior to arriving in Brčko, he organized on his own initiative training for self-defense in close quarters. This training included boxing, wrestling, and even shoving matches. Also, mock demonstrations were conducted, with some soldiers designated as rioters. The experience helped familiarize his troops with what it felt like to be on both sides of a riot. These efforts used developed mutual trust and built cohesive teams, a key elements in mission command, and gave these teams a shared understanding of what they and the larger unit would do if they found themselves in the midst of a violent demonstration. That trust and understanding would soon be tested.

Captain Hendricks began assessing his mission orders, taking initiative to position his forces where they could secure key locations in the city. He placed an infantry platoon near the vital Brčko Bridge connecting Croatia with Bosnia. This effectively prevented any movement by the Serbs to provoke a Croatian response. The military police platoon was broken up into squads to man checkpoints at the other entrances

into Brčko. A squad of military police was positioned at an intersection west of the police station, and an infantry squad was to the east. Another infantry platoon was broken down into squads and positioned to watch over other key sites in the city. Captain Hendricks then took the rest of his available force, a platoon and two additional squads, to secure the Brčko police station. All of these forces were in position by 0300 on 28 August.<sup>12</sup>

With his troops in place, Captain Hendricks entered the police station. There he met the Serb police officer in charge. As he did not know the identity of the loyal police chief, Hendricks was unsure if he was speaking to the old hard-liner or his loyal replacement. And the Serb officer did not volunteer his loyalties. Unable to determine the individual's loyalty or establish communications with Lieutenant Colonel Greer for guidance, Captain Hendricks decided to depart the building.<sup>13</sup> Clearly the situation in the town was confused.

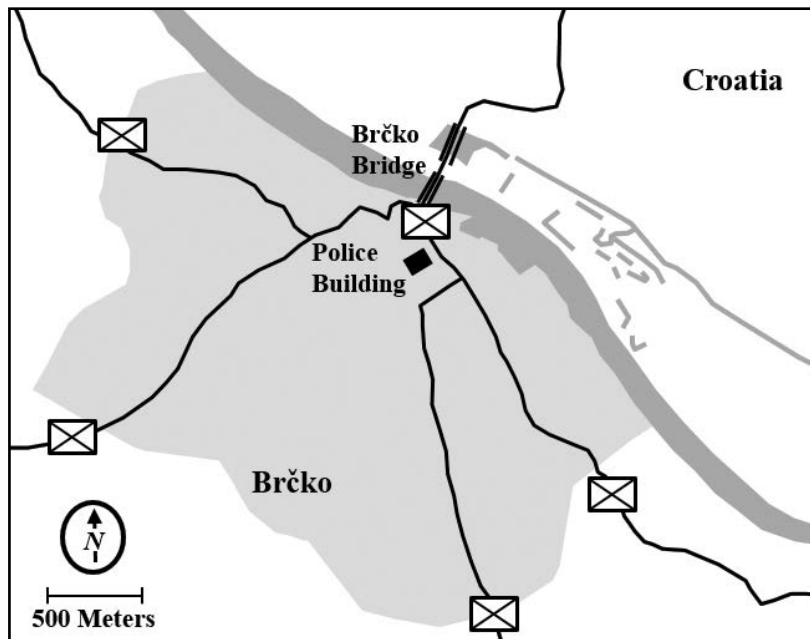


Figure 2. The City of Brčko with American Positions. Created by author.

At 0430, the city's sirens suddenly sounded and hundreds of angry demonstrators poured into the streets. Very quickly, there were over 1,000 people in the city center, many of whom seemed drunk. These demonstrators quickly confronted the 80 US Soldiers in the vicinity of the police station. The push of the mass of hostile Serbs separated squads from each other, placing the troops in serious physical danger. With the US troops vastly outnumbered and unable to support each other, the risk to Captain Hendricks' Soldiers outweighed the probability of mission success, and he now exercised disciplined initiative by ordering all of his scattered units to rally at the Brčko Bridge. Although it took 20 minutes to regroup his troops near the police station and move across the street, he managed to avoid a bloody confrontation.<sup>14</sup>

As the crowds spread, they confronted all of Hendricks' positions. The company commander reinforced the military police detachment at the intersection west of the police station with an additional infantry squad, but the Soldiers there were still greatly outnumbered by the growing crowds. Soon the troops came under a rain of bricks and any heavy object the demonstrators found at hand. Under this assault, the force managed to extricate itself without serious incident and rallied to Captain Hendricks, who had moved to the bridge.<sup>15</sup> The other scattered American squads came under similar attack but were able to extract themselves and travel to the bridge. Finding that he had his first casualties, two seriously injured soldiers, Hendricks ordered them to be evacuated them to an Army hospital at nearby Camp McGovern.<sup>16</sup>

What Hendricks had accomplished was an orderly retreat to a position of strength where his forces could consolidate and defend themselves. This was another act of disciplined initiative. The situation was changing and he had to adapt while still retaining his focus on the end state. Captain Hendricks had not been given specific rules of engagement (ROE) for this mission and had to quickly improvise. It was not an easy task. Under extreme pressure from the demonstrators, the Soldiers had had to keep their lines firm and tight to prevent their adversaries from breaking through. To maintain momentum during the movement to the bridge, US troops resorted to fighting back with their fists, as well as using the butts of their rifles. A number of Serbians were injured while the Americans defended themselves, but the line held, and the Soldiers were able to reach the bridge without serious casualties. Despite the escalating violence, Hendricks had not given permission for his soldiers to use lethal force, a decision that prevented many deaths and the creation of an international incident.<sup>17</sup>

With the situation in Brčko spiraling out of control, all of the various international agency personnel hastily evacuated the city. Some other 40 personnel were brought to safety by a relief force. The city now belonged to hostile Serbs for the time being. Whether the violence would spread was still uncertain.<sup>18</sup>

For the rest of the day Captain Hendricks and his command remained at the Brčko Bridge facing an angry mob, often at arm's reach and willing to use Molotov cocktails and other violence to provoke a major incident. Hendricks at this point adapted the ROE on his own initiative, ensuring that his Soldiers had loaded ammunition in their weapons and were prepared to use lethal force as a last resort. In an attempt to control the level of tension and increase his Soldiers' awareness, he ordered them to unload their weapons during the periodic lulls in the riot. This tactic proved useful in deterring the demonstrators, as it implied the Soldiers were prepared to use lethal force. As the hours wore on the Soldiers were rotated to a safe area on the other side of the bridge to rest and regroup. Although warning shots were fired occasionally, the careful use of escalated actions was successful in deterring the raging mob and in keeping his Soldiers somewhat fresh and alert.<sup>19</sup> At no time did the troops at the bridge fire their weapons with the intention of killing civilian demonstrators.

This alertness was vital around 0600 when a commandeered fuel truck was driven up to the site by a Serbian demonstrator. Parked among the throng and within a few feet of the Soldiers, the truck became a major threat, promising to cause major carnage if set on fire. Captain Hendricks instantly realized the danger. With his interpreter and a loyal policeman, he ran to the vehicle and confronted the driver at gunpoint. The driver backed the fuel truck through the crowd and away from the scene. A catastrophe was averted.<sup>20</sup>

When Major General Grange learned of the events unfolding in Brčko and Bijeljina he gave Lieutenant Colonel Greer additional forces to react to the situation. These forces consisted of a cavalry squadron and a company of Soldiers riding in wheeled vehicles. As it turned out, their presence was not needed; by the time they arrived, the riot in Brčko was petering out. By 2000 a calm of sorts was finally restored. The demonstrators were exhausted and drifted back to their homes. The next morning did not see the resumption of the riot and order was reestablished.<sup>21</sup> The installment of the new loyal police would come at a later date. No lives had been lost. There would be no international condemnation of the US Army for use of excessive force. And throughout the worst moments of the turmoil, Lieutenant Colonel Greer had not intervened to take command of the US force in Brčko. He had created a shared understanding with his subordinate commander, Captain Hendricks, and trusted him to handle the situation correctly.

The Brčko Riot taught the US Army that it had to be better prepared to engage in civil disturbances. The Brčko riot had placed Soldiers at risk and put commanders in the precarious position of making quick and difficult decisions without the benefit of instant communications with higher headquarters. Captain Hendricks had thought through possible scenarios and made some wise preparations. He previously trained his company with exercises designed to prepare soldiers for possible confrontations with rioters. He had given serious thought to when his force would have to resort to deadly force. After this incident the US forces in Bosnia were equipped with riot gear, including shields and batons, and were instructed on their use.

The Brčko Bridge riot serves as an excellent example of the US Army's employment of mission command at all levels. Captain Hendricks employed disciplined initiative in conducting specialized preparation prior to the mission, including the rudimentary training in riot control. The mock riots, wrestling, and shoving exercises he devised on his own built confidence among his soldiers and their leaders. Through this training, he built cohesive teams and established shared understanding, both principles of mission command. As a result, Captain Hendricks was confident enough in his subordinate leaders and soldiers to deploy them to widely separate locations around the city in a very dangerous situation. It is clear he trusted them to exercise good judgement and apply the appropriate level of force, if needed. Captain Hendricks also trusted his junior leaders to withdraw when the situation in their respective positions became untenable.

Captain Hendricks also benefitted from the leadership of Lieutenant General Greer and Major General Grange, both of whom practiced mission command principles. Either or both of these senior officers could have easily interjected themselves at Brčko, but they trusted the officer on the scene to use his judgement. Had the riot turned into a massacre, these senior leaders would have had to shoulder the blame. Lieutenant Colonel Greer also could have chosen a more conservative course of action: keeping his command together and subduing one city at a time with an overwhelming force. Instead, he sent Captain Hendricks' reinforced company off to Brcko, trusting the younger officer completely.

Having a clear commander's intent also came into play. Although the initial mission briefing given to Captain Hendricks was vague in details, there was a certain clarity in his company's mission in Brčko. That was simply to help implement the Dayton Accords by assisting the establishment of the Bosnian police units loyal to Plavsic. Bloodshed would be avoided if possible but the lives of US Army personnel were paramount. The troops of Delta Company understood this and showed stalwart discipline in the face of the violent demonstrators. They trusted their leadership to make prudent decisions and relied on each other against those intent on inflicting serious bodily harm.

The events of the Brčko Bridge riot have faded in memory, largely because of the success of implementing the Dayton Accords and of course the passage of time. Yet the actions of the US Army on that day stand as a stellar example of leadership using the principles of mission command.

## Notes

1. Norman Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1995) 54-56. Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 204-5.
2. Wesley Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 84-5.
3. Gerard Toal and Carl Dahlman, *Bosnia Remade: Ethnic Cleansing and its Reversal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 165-6.
4. Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 80-82.
5. Toal and Dahlman, *Bosnia Remade*, 217.
6. Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 66-7.
7. Robert F. Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2004), 151.
151. See also Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 86.
8. Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 151-2.
9. Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 152. See also Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 86-7.
10. Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 152.
11. Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 153. See also Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 86-7.
12. Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 153.
13. Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 153-4.
14. Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 154.
15. Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 154.
16. Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 154.
17. Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 154-5.
18. Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 87. See also Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 155.
19. Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 156.
20. Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 156.
21. Bauman, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 156.



## Chapter 10

### Disciplined Initiative and the Commander's Intent

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Brian C. Leakey

Commanders drive planning by describing their understanding and visualization of the operational environment (OE) to staffs and subordinate commanders. The Commander's Intent is clearly the major inject point of conceptual planning from Army Design Methodology (ADM) into detailed planning. Yet many commanders struggle to write effective Intent statements in a manner that clearly describe their visualization, facilitates effective planning, and provides for disciplined initiative. This article addresses only the Commander's Intent, specifically the "Key Tasks" portion.

Commanders describe their visualization in terms of commander's intent, planning guidance (including an operational approach), commander's critical information requirements (CCIR), and essential elements of friendly information (EEFI).<sup>1</sup> Commanders develop their intent statement *personally* using the following components:

- Expanded Purpose (not the same "why" as shown in the mission statement, but the b-r-o-a-d-e-r purpose of the operation and its relationship to the force as a whole).
- Key Tasks – those activities the force must perform *as a whole* to achieve the desired end-state.
- End-state – desired future conditions of the friendly force in relationship to desired conditions of the enemy, terrain, and civil considerations.

Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, *The Operations Process*, states that "key tasks are not specified tasks for any subordinate unit; however, they may be sources of implied tasks... Examples of key tasks include terrain the force must control or an effect the force must have on the enemy."<sup>2</sup>

Over the last two decades, the Key Tasks portion of Commander's Intent had, in too many instances, become a lengthy "laundry list" of everything the Commander thought necessary for mission accomplishment. The Key Task "list" was oftentimes so long that staffs were unable to discern what was genuinely "Key" to the commander. Many staffs interpreted the lengthy Key Task "list" as the Commander prescribing or directing a course of action (COA) to them. Staffs also struggled with using these Key Tasks as a basis for evaluation criteria (i.e., how many to use, which should be weighted, etc.). As a result, Army doctrine writers removed Key Tasks from Commander's Intent in the March 2010 edition of FM 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Key Tasks were brought back into the Commander's Intent in the May 2012 version of ADRP 5-0).

Further complicating this challenge, Army doctrine is inundated with the term "task." Variations include: Commander's tasks, staff tasks, offensive tasks, defensive tasks, stability tasks, tactical mission tasks, critical tasks, essential tasks, *ad infinitum*. Planning staffs routinely struggle to differentiate between tactical mission tasks, critical tasks, essential tasks, and key tasks; is it any wonder that the concept of key tasks is abused/misused? This article proposes replacing the term "Key Tasks" with a term that emphasizes the relationship between Key Tasks and the operational approach: "Approach." The Approach would consist of a *short* list of tasks, efforts, or effects with corresponding purposes or level of importance.

It is important to understand how the operational approach, developed either in the Design Concept or through the commander's personal visualization, *informs* development of the Key Tasks (Approach) in the Commander's Intent. Mission command philosophy facilitates bridging existing gaps between the art of command and the science of control. According to ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, the mission command concept provides commanders a mechanism to "counter the uncertainty of operations by reducing the amount of certainty needed to act." This is profound; mission command provides staffs and subordinate leaders the ability to act on a concept, rather than rely on a detailed plan for execution. This further validates the importance of the Commander's Intent.

Given the complexity and ambiguity of operations, the Commander’s Intent must provide focus to staffs and subordinate leaders as they “wade” through uncertainty. Current and future operations are nebulous; conditions change often and rapidly. Subordinate leaders must often make decisions that have strategic implications without first talking to their commanders; for example, an engagement with a local tribal leader, followed by an offensive operation, transitioning to partnering with a host nation police chief, then conducting an assessment of local infrastructure capacity. Constantly confronted with unanticipated conditions or events, subordinate leaders must routinely make decisions without instructions written in an OPORD from higher headquarters (think of the Rapid Decision Making and Synchronization Process [RDSP]). TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *Army Operating Concept – Win in a Complex World*, stresses that Army leaders must improve and *thrive* in ambiguity; rather than seeking favorable force ratios at a decisive point, leaders must achieve cognitive dominance to prevent, shape, and win in the future OE. Concise, understandable Commander’s Intent statements, with a clearly understood Approach, will drive cognitive dominance.

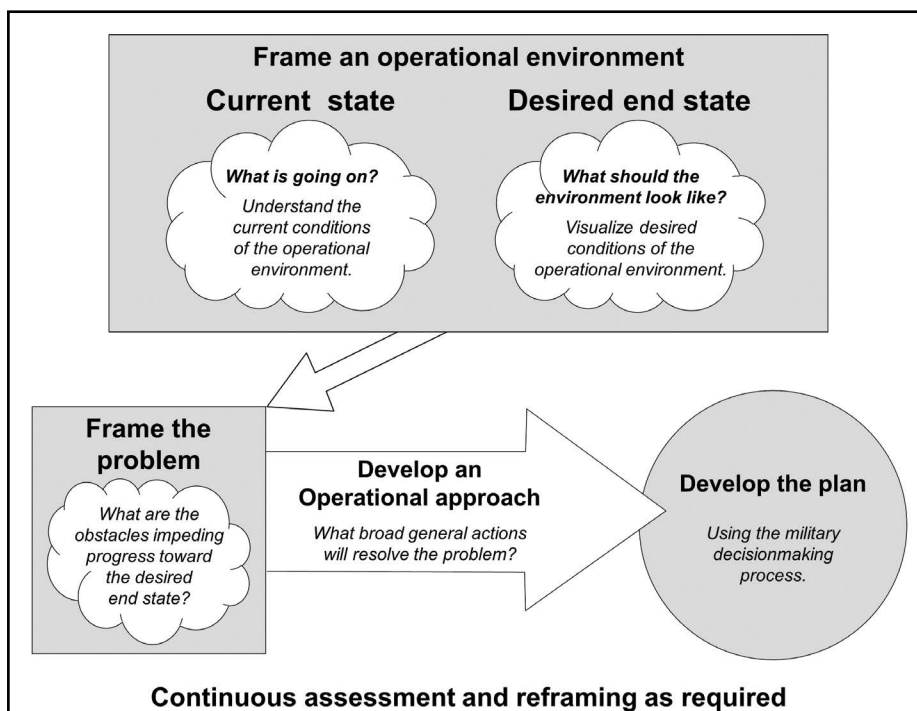


Figure 1. Army design methodology. ADRP 5-0, *The Operations Process*, page 2-6.

Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, describes the operational approach as a *commander’s description of the broad actions the force must take to achieve the desired military end state*. It is the commander’s visualization of how the operation should transform current conditions into the desired conditions at the end state – how the commander wants the operational environment to look at the successful conclusion of operations. This should sound familiar since the Army adopted the joint definition in ADRP 5-0, *The Operations Process* (May 2012). ADRP 5-0 expands on this definition by stating that the operational approach describes the broad, general actions that will resolve the problem. ADRP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, defines operational approach as “a description of the broad actions the force must take to transform current conditions into those desired at end state.”<sup>3</sup> Commanders use a common doctrinal language to visualize and describe their operational approach. The operational approach provides a framework that relates tactical tasks to the desired end state. It provides a unifying purpose and focus to all operations.” In his book *Planning for Action: Campaign Concepts and Tools*, Dr. Jack Kem states that commanders develop the



operational approach or “theory of action” to “bridge the gap” in order to transform the current environment to the desired end state.<sup>4</sup>

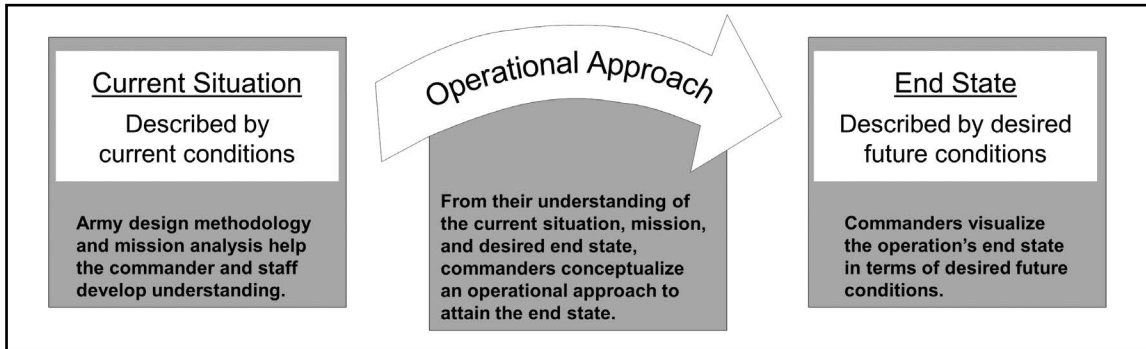


Figure 2. Completed commander's visualization. ADRP 5-0, The Operations Process, page 1-4.

Remember the importance of Warning Orders (WARNORDs); while staffs directly receive planning guidance for COA development and subsequent planning, subordinate commanders do not, and they are also “consumers” of the Commander’s Intent. Removal of “Key Tasks” from the Commander’s Intent in the March 2010 version of FM 5-0 was an overly hasty response to leaders who wrote a litany of prescriptive tasks. The doctrinal result was a neutered statement containing an optional “Purpose,” coupled with a “cookie cutter” end-state that provided little to nothing for subordinate commanders to use for planning. When a division headquarters published WARNORD #2, what description of the division commander’s visualization did BCT Commanders use to conduct parallel planning? ADRP 5-0 *The Operations Process*, May 2012, rightly reintroduced Key Tasks back into Commander’s Intent.

In the interests of common understanding, facilitating planning (and parallel planning by subordinate units), and overall improvement in mission command as the integrating warfighting function, “Approach” should replace the term “Key Tasks” of Commander’s Intent. Developed by the commander either individually or assisted by a “Design Team,” the Approach can address specific actions to be accomplished, conditions to be established, use of defeat or stability mechanisms, and potential lines of operation or lines of effort.<sup>5</sup> Since the Approach is a broad conceptualization to resolving the problem, staffs would be less constrained in planning, yet be enabled to translate the Approach (along with the broader purpose and end-state) into feasible, acceptable, suitable COAs.

The terminology used for describing the Approach should be clear, concise, unambiguous words and should state the “why.” Phrases like “*Aggressively mass effects on OBJ BRAVO*” are useless (would a unit *timidly* mass effects?). Standing Operating Procedure (SOP) or obvious implied task phrases like “*Conduct river crossing,*” “*Conduct RSO&I IAW Annex W,*” “*Protect the population – take all precautions to limit civilian casualties,*” or “*Conduct forward passage of lines*” are specified or implied tasks that would be described in the Concept of Operations. On the other hand, the following examples of Approach events state the “why” and describe tasks, efforts, or effects with corresponding purposes or levels of importance that would enable staffs to plan and subordinate leaders to execute with disciplined initiative:

- “Rapidly generate combat power south of the XXXX River to sustain offensive tempo.”
- “Sever ENY LOCs in the vicinity of OBJ XXXXX to isolate his offensive capability.”
- “Minimize collateral damage to key infrastructure and cultural sites to set conditions for stability.”
- “Focus IO on influencing the population to not interfere with Coalition operations.”
- “Control border to dissuade ENY intervention and isolate [insurgent] from sources of support.”
- “Restore essential services to acceptable levels to facilitate a return to normalcy.”

- “Influence local leadership and power brokers to support the government and denounce [insurgency].”

Some in the doctrine community advocate reducing the Commander’s Intent to simply the commander’s visualization of the end-state. They argue that the current expanded Purpose is already contained in the mission and intent of the next two higher headquarters, and the Key Tasks are no different than the essential tasks specified in the mission statement. While the definitions of Key Tasks and Essential Tasks are vague enough to create problems differentiating between the two (as stated earlier), the complexity of current and future operations requires commanders to articulate an Approach to staffs and subordinate leaders that provides them the ability to immediately exercise judgment based upon concepts, rather than waiting on detailed orders. The “why” is key to creating opportunities for disciplined initiative.

## Notes

1. Department of the Army, ADRP 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-5.
2. Department of the Army, ADRP 5-0, 2-19.
3. Department of Defense, JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), II-7.
4. Jack D. Kem, *Planning for Action: Campaign Concepts and Tools* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2012), 58.
5. Kem, *Planning for Action*, 57.



# Chapter 11

## FOB STRIKE

Captain Thomas C. Evensen

Leaders and Soldiers in an operational unit conducting a rotation at a Combat Training Center (CTC) experience the opportunity to identify areas for organizational and individual improvements. The Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) enabled the 2nd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 82nd Airborne Division to exercise its capabilities during a Joint Forcible Entry (JFE) in September of 2014. 2nd BCT deployed a myriad of direct and indirect assets in order to accomplish the JFE, and Charlie Battery “COBRA STRIKE,” 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment was one of them. This article will focus on the application of three out of six principles of mission command employed by Charlie Battery, and the several challenges encountered by its Commander. Cobra Strike’s Commander did well at using mission orders during each phase of the exercise, and accepted prudent risk throughout the operation. The Paratroopers of Cobra Strike had developed a shared understanding of both their battle position, role within the Battalion, and the BCT Commander’s overall intent during mission execution. The three principles that this article focuses on are: 1) Build cohesive teams through mutual trust; 2) Provide a clear commander’s intent; and 3) Exercise disciplined initiative.<sup>1</sup> This article is not intended to diminish the abilities of the unit or its Commander, but rather analyze how Cobra Strike could have “exploited the dynamics of human relationships to the advantage of friendly forces and to the disadvantage of an enemy.”<sup>2</sup> This rational approach to human interaction discussed in ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, provides an unemotional, logical manner of considering the philosophy of command and how it applies to Cobra Strike’s JRTC Rotation.

### **Build Cohesive Teams Through Mutual Trust**

Cobra Strike was not directed to take part in the initial assault, rather it was placed on the Priority Vehicle List (PVL) for airland operations. 2nd BCT utilized the flight landing strip to rapidly build up combat power through airland operations, after seizing the OBJ, and establishing mission command nodes. 2nd Platoon, Charlie Company (2/C) arrived into the objective, with three M777A2 howitzers, approximately eighteen hours after the airborne assault, at the Arrival/Departure Airfield Control Group (A/DACG) located near the FLS.<sup>3</sup> 2/C established itself and called up “In Position Ready to Fire” (IPRTF) four hours after arriving on the lodgment. Challenges in the execution of mission command were the reason for such a large time gap between arrival and IPRTF. The following is the Charlie Battery commander’s memory of initial frustrations:

My biggest issue with 2/C was when the platoon leader got “admin killed.” I had to take a much more hands on approach to that platoon. [Without a platoon leader] the platoon sergeant had so much on his plate, he was smoked. The guy went days without sleeping, I had to say okay, smoke, go to sleep, me and the gunnery sergeant will take care of things for the next however many hours. The platoon sergeant was trying to do platoon leader and platoon sergeant things at the same time. It was the only time I ever saw him ready to quit. He was so exhausted he wasn’t functioning. The [Fire Directions Officer] FDO conducting FDO duties. His FDNCO was brand new to the section, and so I wasn’t about to take the FDO out of the FDC to say, “you’re the PL, leave that FDC up to the brand new chief.”<sup>4</sup>

The “admin-kill” to which the Commander refers occurred because the platoon leader conducted a one-vehicle movement without an Observer, Coach, Trainer present. His decision resulted in his own “death,” which amounted to 48-72 hours of administrative processing through the BCT’s personnel shop. Once completed, the process culminated in a ‘replacement,’ or in the case of JRTC, the same individual rejoined his unit in order to continue training.

When the loss of any Soldier, Non-Commissioned Officer, or Officer occurs, be it through administrative action or actual loss of life, the effects are felt on the organization at every rank. It is well to remember

that “Military operations are complex, human endeavors characterized by the continuous mutual give and take, moves, and countermoves among all participants.”<sup>5</sup> This is especially important for junior leaders to recognize, as they are the individuals who are most affected by changes to their team. The 48-72 hours when the 2/C platoon leader was “killed” was particularly difficult on the platoon sergeant. The “Smoke” (informal name for a Field Artillery Platoon Sergeant) was ordered to reoccupy in a new position in order to establish the platoon in a new fire base location. Reconnaissance, typically executed by the platoon leader, now fell upon the Smoke to execute, leaving a new gunnery sergeant to move the platoon to its new firing point. This caused the Smoke to lose situational awareness of the platoon for a short time and his ability to provide mission command during their movement was degraded. Cobra Strike operated with radios and one Joint Capabilities Release (JCR). The JCR is a digital map of a selected area of operation that reflects real-time locations of friendly units. When the platoon arrived, it took an average of 35 minutes to occupy the new point; the time standard for a 3-gun platoon is 10 minutes.<sup>6</sup> While the primary factor influencing a platoon’s technical and tactical proficiency is prior training, the platoon leader’s presence would have been helpful in the unit’s effort to meet the standard. Military operations, being human endeavors, require each participant to be engaged, present, and thoughtful regarding his mission.

The principle of mission command that was weakest in this instance was “build cohesive teams through mutual trust.”<sup>7</sup> Though mission command speaks to the commander and his role in the execution of military operations, a platoon leader can utilize the principles just as effectively. Prior to the JRTC rotation, it would have been beneficial to exercise “one-man up drills” in which the platoon leader removes a key player in his subordinate teams and trains the small unit on how it will accomplish its mission. Often a platoon leader is paired with an experienced non-commissioned officer (NCO) who looks to the platoon leader as his own personal force multiplier. The platoon leader is an integral part of the decision making process, troop leading procedures, and can often be an extra hand in the actual execution of a mission. Over a long period of time without a platoon leader, tasks will begin to build up for a lone platoon sergeant, and their focus will shift from being the senior non-commissioned leader of the platoon to the planner and facilitator of a mission. It is critical that the team not only trains and develops a shared confidence between the leaders, but also focusses time on training and developing confidence amongst their subordinates acting in positions above their own. To do so will enhance the subordinates’ understanding of their leaders’ positions, and will better prepare the team for unpredictable loss or changes.

### **Provide a Clear Commander’s Intent**

As the mission continued forward, Cobra Strike’s fire base or FOB STRIKE, as it came to be called, continued to encounter challenges. Although the 2/C platoon leader was “re-animated” and rejoined his commander and the platoon, two positions remained empty. The battery executive officer and first sergeant were not part of the battery’s initial deployment, leaving planning, logistics, personnel management, and FOB security solely on the commander’s shoulders. Leading up to the JRTC rotation, Charlie Battery had established a team amongst its leaders. The assumption was made that the Commander, the first sergeant, both platoon leaders, and the executive officer would be present to assist in planning, tracking, and executing the daily missions. The individuals filling these roles were not new to their positions, and had the experience of completing three JFEs leading up to the one executed in Fort Polk, Louisiana. The first sergeant did not arrive to JRTC with 2/C as he was set to arrive later with 1/C, and the executive officer was tasked as the Rear-detachment Commander for the battalion. This incomplete Cobra Strike team conducting operations in JRTC began to exhaust both the Commander and the other junior leaders of the battery.

ADP 6-0 states that “[Good commanders] recognize that military operations take a toll on the moral, physical, and mental stamina of Soldiers.”<sup>8</sup> In this case, the commander himself recognized that his own mental fortitude was waning prior to the arrival of his first sergeant:

[When he arrived] 1SG got to concentrate on a lot of stuff that I wasn’t able to concentrate on for the first couple of days. I didn’t concentrate on security as much as I should have, I was trying to

maintain firing capability. Our security posture got a lot better once 1SG got there. That was the biggest thing, but he just got to concentrate on a lot of stuff that I hadn't got to the first few days; food, water, security. I calmed down a lot and got a lot happier once he got there. I felt like I could go take a nap when he was there, I could take a break; I didn't have to be 100% hyped up all the time because he was there. I had another battery level leader there... If I had an [executive officer], I would have been a lot happier too.<sup>9</sup>

The battery executive officer was engaged as the "Rear-detachment Commander," normally a force multiplier for the battery commander, and would not conduct training at JRTC during this rotation. Generally, a leader's mood can have a significant impact on the morale of a team. With the first sergeant present, the commander was able to deliberately go to sleep, likely resulting in a more restful sleep knowing that there was someone there who could act in his stead. He was able to provide his intent to the first sergeant, who would then exercise his own initiative inside of it to accomplish the mission at hand. Security, as an example, was very likely a part of the Commander's intent when the FOB was established. ADP 6-0 states, "Successful commanders understand they cannot provide guidance or direction for all conceivable contingencies."<sup>10</sup> This statement may be interpreted as, "keep it simple, provide a task, and let your subordinate consider the multitude of possible problems." This is a viable interpretation, but the simple task must be tailored to the level of experience and competency of the subordinate receiving it. The commander could have expanded his intent concerning security for the platoon leader and platoon sergeant to describe the minimum fortifications necessary. Expanding the commander's intent and describing not only the limits of action, but also the minimum standard required will greatly clarify the expected outcome for junior leaders.

### **Exercise Disciplined Initiative**

The lack of an executive officer posed problems for Cobra Strike for the duration of the exercise. The commander paid particular attention to the types of fire missions relayed from battalion, and was leaning on the platoon leaders to manage the supply trains moving to and from the airlands. Technical mission processing, though a priority for the commander under normal circumstances, was not the most pressing matter at hand in this instance. The mission required the commander to analyze his higher headquarters' intent and provide direction to his subordinates not only to provide fire support, but to sustain as a battery as well.

[One problem with resupply was] getting it from the Rearm, Refuel, Resupply and Survey Point to where we were. Fox Company [the Forward Supply Company (FSC)] had a hard time conducting the number of resupplies they needed to conduct. [The Battalion] wasn't spread out a long way apart, we were just in a whole bunch of different spots. We had a hard time continuously sending resupply patrols out because every guy in every truck was another guy and gun down from our firing capability and security. On top of that, Charlie was wildly undermanned, with eight men on a howitzer and no ammo-sections, I couldn't just throw a few trucks out with the appropriate manning. That would leave the ammo convoy understrength if they had an issue, and it would leave the howitzers with even fewer guys to operate them.<sup>11</sup>

The FSC discussed in their after action review that, "Communication between the FSC and BN TOC, and S4 in forecasting BTRY consumption rates... could be better planned at least 24 hours out instead of last minute."<sup>12</sup> This lack of communication resulted in an overabundance of High Explosive projectiles, but a lack of white phosphorus.<sup>13</sup> The lack of a battery executive officer placed the responsibility of logistics planning on the platoon leader's shoulders.

The current authorized strength of Cobra Strike does not include an executive officer. This was not the case during the JRTC rotation in September 2014. The executive officer, in JFEs prior, managed the supply of the battery in conjunction with the supply sergeant. This duty, now incumbent on the platoon leaders, was not well trained between the two junior lieutenants. Cobra Strike offered a capability to the BCT that its 105mm sister batteries did not. This capability came in the form of an indirect fires provided minefield, a capability that, had the platoon leaders considered planning for ahead of time, would have been effectively

provided. The battery was informed that a FASCAM (Family of Scatterable Mines) mission would likely occur. The platoon leaders did not forecast any ammo for this, and as pointed out by the Observer, Coach, Trainer Team; “Lack of knowledge of ammunition requirements and understanding of the employment process of the FASCAM led to the BTRY not having enough ammunition on hand [IOT effectively employ a minefield].”<sup>14</sup> A possible tactic, technique, and procedure in order to mitigate a lack of supply for any mission, is to develop a list of capabilities that a particular unit has to offer its higher headquarters. This list must encompass doctrinal tasks that the unit can provide. The leaders of that unit should set aside time to discuss what capabilities they are able to provide at that moment of an operation, and what must be done in order to achieve the full range of capabilities. In the case of Cobra Strike, the platoon leadership could have requested a wide range of munitions in order to achieve their full capabilities, even though they were not specifically told to do so. ADP 6-0 offers that, “[the Commander’s intent] gives subordinates the confidence to apply their judgment in ambiguous and urgent situations.”<sup>15</sup> An intent can be provided through indirect means. For instance, the incorporation of an M777A2, 155mm towed howitzer, Battery in a BCT operation can imply that the BCT Commander intends on utilizing FASCAM, Precision Guided Munitions, and Rocket Assisted Projectiles when engaging the enemy (155mm howitzers employ all of these munitions). Mission accomplishment requires disciplined initiative at every level to achieve a Commander’s Intent and accomplish a mission.

Training provides a unique opportunity for commanders at every level to challenge their subordinate units with situations that are selective in the systems they test. Realistic training, such as the training conducted at a combat training center, or selective training, such as that conducted by a commander to test a particular platoon, yield different but equally important results. Successful commanders, as acknowledged by ADP 6-0, “allow subordinates to learn through their mistakes and develop experience.”<sup>16</sup> Cobra Strike, as a whole, learned that its junior leaders, such as its gunnery sergeant and section chiefs, are just as important as its platoon leaders and first sergeant. Nurturing their ability to work systems such as logistical planning, tactical reconnaissance, and technical fire mission processing is paramount to building a cohesive team that leads to the unit’s success. Their training over the next several months while they assumed a posture of readiness as a part of the Global Response Force, focused primarily on junior leaders receiving an order, analyzing the commander’s intent, and exercising disciplined initiative at the lowest levels in order to accomplish their mission. The battery has not perfected this, and as its junior leaders are moved to higher positions throughout the battalion and the US Army, it is a training focus that will likely wane. The only way to remain flexible enough to overcome a particular battle is to empower the junior leaders in a unit, teach them how to accomplish a mission within their commander’s intent, and execute with enough discipline that the second and third order effects maintain a positive balance on the side of the US Army.



## Notes

1. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 12 March 2014).
2. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0.
3. 2nd Battalion (Airborne) 319th Field Artillery Regiment “BLACK FALCONS” *After Action Review* (Joint Readiness Training Center. 16 September – 01 October 2014).
4. CPT Andrew V. Bryant, interview by author, 6 August 2015.
5. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0.
6. 2nd Battalion (Airborne) 319th Field Artillery Regiment “BLACK FALCONS” *After Action Review*.
7. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0.
8. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0.
9. CPT Andrew V. Bryant, interview by author, 6 August 2015.
10. 2nd Battalion (Airborne) 319th Field Artillery Regiment “BLACK FALCONS” *After Action Review*.
11. CPT Andrew V. Bryant, interview by author, 6 August 2015.
12. 2nd Battalion (Airborne) 319th Field Artillery Regiment “BLACK FALCONS” *After Action Review*.
13. 2nd Battalion (Airborne) 319th Field Artillery Regiment “BLACK FALCONS” *After Action Review*.
14. 2nd Battalion (Airborne) 319th Field Artillery Regiment “BLACK FALCONS” *After Action Review*.
15. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0.
16. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0.



## Chapter 12

### The Battle for Observation Post Bari Alai

John J. McGrath

The essence of mission command is a combination of clear instructions from the chain of command to subordinate units which are then given the independence of action to respond to battlefield events in such a way that the subordinate reaction is in tune with the overall intent without requiring detailed follow-on instructions. Such a concept requires the creation of cohesive teams where superiors and subordinates project a culture of mutual trust. To work, mission command also requires a shared understanding between leaders and led at all levels and a shared understanding of goals and missions. This combination of centralized planning and decentralized execution provides the flexibility and initiative necessary for success in modern military operations.

Such a framework, while most apparent in conventional operations with rapidly changing conditions, is also relevant to counterinsurgency operations which are typically ongoing and consist of the battlefield being divided into specific sectors that are the responsibility of various subordinate units. In such cases, the commander's intent is an overarching set of goals and priorities, which in many cases represented a continuity from previous unit rotations. In such circumstances, the systems established for both combat and non-combat activities are essential to respond to unexpected situations. This approach can be illustrated in the case of the response to an enemy attack on an isolated outpost in northeastern Afghanistan in 2009.

On 1 May 2009, insurgent forces massed and attacked an Afghan Army position called Observation Post (OP) Bari Alai in Ghaziabad District, Kunar Province. The outpost, with a garrison of about 40 soldiers consisting of an Afghan Army infantry platoon, four Latvian advisors, an American advisor and two American communications specialists, was located on high ground overlooking the Kunar River valley. The insurgent force briefly overran the OP and captured a dozen Afghan soldiers. Coalition forces immediately commenced a relief and counterstrike operation which quickly and successfully reestablished the outpost and forced the enemy to release their prisoners. The use of mission command principles allowed the American leadership the flexibility to respond in a resolute and decisive way to this unexpected enemy action.

The Afghan state is a hodgepodge of nationalities and ethnic groups, with many such groups further subdivided into often feuding tribes. Nowhere else is this more apparent than in the northeastern part of the country in the provinces of Kunar and Nuristan. In Kunar's Pech Valley and on the western side of the Kunar River Valley lived various tribal groups from the Pashtun and Nuristani linguistic group. These groups often fought amongst each other and the other groups, most notably over water rights, and sometimes forcing migrations. And although they respected, at least in the abstract, Afghan government legitimacy, Nuristanis acted as though the parts of Kunar Province (Naray and Ghaziabad districts) north of the Kunar River in which they lived were part of Nuristan Province.<sup>1</sup> When Coalition forces arrived in the area in 2006, the new arrivals entered a region in which conflict and violence was common.

Geographically, Ghaziabad District had two main terrain features: narrow valleys centered on watercourses and rugged, steep mountains separating the valleys. The Kunar River flowed through the southern half of the district. The Kunar valley was relatively narrow, and with high mountains on both sides has been referred to by one American commander as "trying to fight from the bottom of the Grand Canyon."<sup>2</sup> In the limited space on the west bank of the river was an improved dirt road that ran the length of the valley from the provincial capital of Asadabad to the town of Naray. The road was scheduled to be paved, but the long-delayed project had only been partially completed, and a bridge was erected across the Kunar at the village of Saw. In addition to the Kunar Valley, there were three major capillary valleys on the west side of the Kunar in Ghaziabad, each of which were hubs of insurgent activity. From north to south they were the Helgal (south of the village of Nishagam) and the Darin and the Tsunel (north of Nishagam). Across the river farther to the north was the Saw Valley, another enemy stronghold.<sup>3</sup>

In 2009, Coalition forces in Afghanistan were conducting an ongoing (since 2006) counterinsurgency campaign against a variety of insurgent groups. With only a limited number of US troops deployed to the country, forces were spread especially thin in Afghanistan. This was certainly true for Kunar Province. In 2009, the 6th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment (6-4th Cav), from the US Army's 3d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, was responsible for Ghaziabad District as well as Naray in Kunar Province and the Kamdesh and Barg-e-Matal districts in Nuristan. The squadron, which consisted of about 350 soldiers, had arrived in July 2008 and took over from its immediate predecessor the manning of two preexisting bases in the Kamdesh District, a large base in Naray District, and various small observation posts and other sites. To do so, the unit had available a total of seven 30-man platoons under two troop (the cavalry equivalent of a company) headquarters. To accomplish this mission, the squadron commander, Lieutenant Colonel James Markert, also used part of his Headquarters Troop (HHT), normally employed in a supporting role, as frontline troops. Accordingly, the HHT was responsible for the Naray district and the base there called Forward Operating Base (FOB) Bostick. A reduced B Troop manned a combat outpost (COP) at the former royal hunting lodge (COP Lowell) at Kamu on the Lindy Sin River (the extension of the Kunar River into eastern Nuristan) and a similarly reduced B Troop was station farther west along the Lindy Sin near Kamdesh (COP Keating). Keating was the most northerly and most isolated base manned by US forces and would later (in a different unit rotation) be attacked in Fall 2009 by a large insurgent force. Each of these posts also contained contingents of the Afghan National Army.

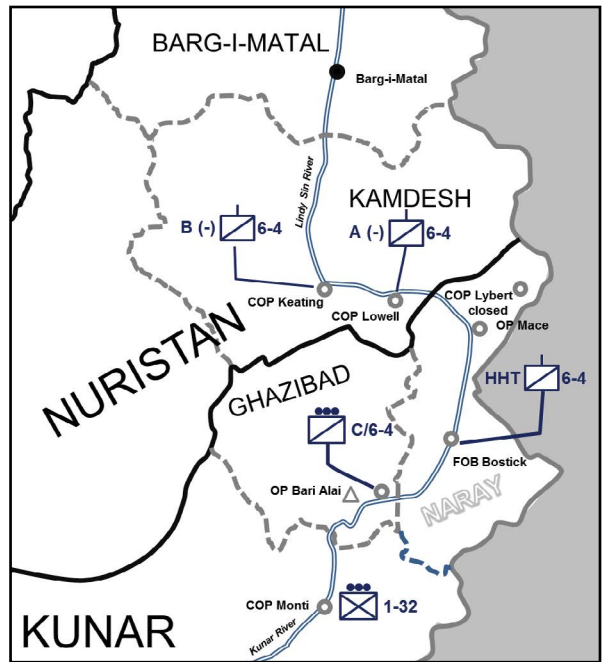


Figure 1. American Stationing in Northeastern Kunar, 2009. Created by author.

Ghaziabad District had a minimal troop presence, with its prime importance being as a passage route between Asadabad and Naray along the Kunar River Road. Although generally quiet, the district had its share of incidents prior to May 2009, mostly attacks on Coalition forces traveling on the road. On 18 July 2008 a supply convoy headed to FOB Bostick was ambushed along the river road about five and a half miles south of Nishagam and four miles north of COP Monti, in Bar Kunar District. The ambush was the largest enemy action in the district up to that date, taking place during an American unit changeover and only five days after the large battle at the village of Wanat, 15 miles to the west. The ambush was repulsed by quick reaction troops from the Pech valley to the west and COP Monti, Apache attack helicopters and Air Force jets as the enemy attempted to withdraw north towards Nishagam. Eleven Americans from the newly arrived 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry (1-26th IN) and one Afghan soldier were wounded. Three high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs) were destroyed and two damaged, although most of the civilian supply trucks in the convoy survived. In September 2008 a patrol from the 1-26th IN was ambushed along the road north of Asmar.<sup>4</sup>

To protect the road, in January 2009 the Afghan National Army (ANA) established a company outpost at the Ghaziabad district center at Nishagam. The Afghan company in turn placed a platoon-sized observation post, named after an ANA soldier who was killed earlier, OP Bari Alai, atop the mountain that overlooked the village to the northwest. An Afghan police checkpoint (CP Lion's Den) was also established at a chokepoint on the road about a half mile north of Nishagam. As there were numerous small ambushes along the river road, Lieutenant Colonel Markert transferred a platoon to a new small vehicle patrol base

(VPB Tsunel) next to the road at the head of the Tsunel Valley in the spring of 2009, three miles northeast of Checkpoint Lion’s Den. On a hilltop overlooking the new base and the valley, a squad-sized observation post (OP Tsunel East) was also established.

These isolated outposts were vulnerable to attacks by massed groups of insurgents, although there had been no real inkling that such an attack was in the offing. The security situation was adequate enough for the district governor to conduct business on a daily basis, something that could not be said for all districts in Kunar and Nuristan. However, Markert knew that an attack was possible because there were intelligence indicators of a large enemy force somewhere in the Tsunel Valley. Accordingly, the 6-4 Cav commander had several systems in place to mitigate the risk. First, unlike the outposts in Nuristan, the Ghaziabad sites were along a major road and not far removed from major bases to both the north (Bostick) and the south (Monti). Reinforcements could arrive rapidly by road or by helicopter. Apart from these geographical factors, a quick reaction force (QRF) could be rapidly drawn from a reserve platoon that Markert maintained at FOB Bostick just for such emergencies. For fire support, field artillery cannons stationed at both Bostick and Monti were within range of most of Ghaziabad and Markert deployed a 120-mm mortar section from his C Troop at VPB Tsunel.<sup>5</sup>

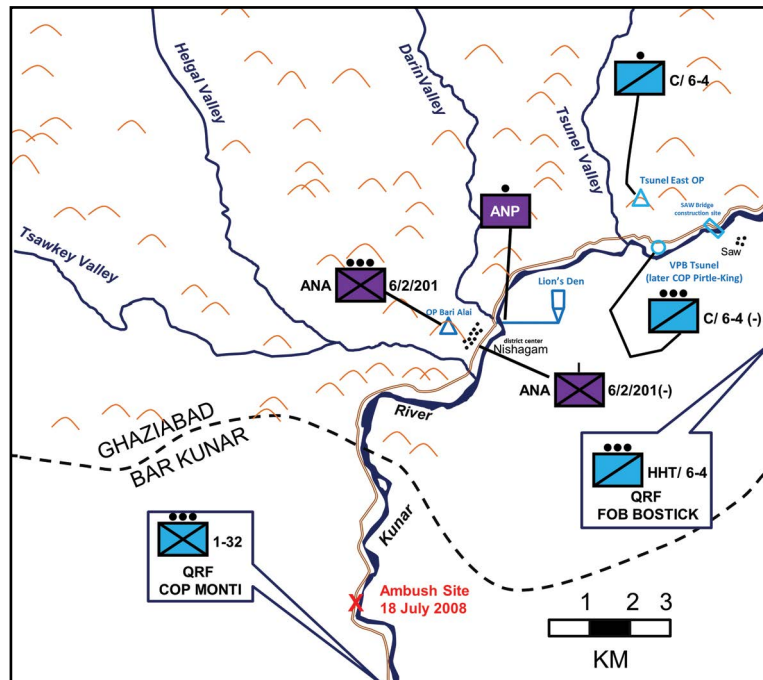


Figure 2. The Nishagam Area Before the Attack. Created by author.

The Afghan National Army unit stationed at Nishagam and OP Bari Alai was a company from the 6th Battalion (or Kandak), 2d Brigade, 201st Corps. The battalion had only been active in northeastern Kunar Province since January 2009, having replaced another ANA battalion in a routine rotational scheme. The new unit had a team of advisors composed mostly of Latvian Army personnel with some Americans. Markert believed that because of leadership deficiencies at the lower levels, ANA units were only effective when operating at company level or higher. The ANA relied on the American advisors for fire support and long range communications. An ANA platoon along with several Latvian advisors and one American advisor manned OP Bari Alai on 1 May 2009. Because of its elevation, the post was also a communications hub and Markert had placed two American communications specialists there, for a total garrison of about 40 at the OP.

The position dominated the area around Nishagam, including the river road and the capillary valleys. Although the insurgents in the region could not hope to permanently occupy the heights given the availability of Coalition firepower and reinforcements, they could possibly destroy the OP, perhaps permanently, and embarrass the ANA forces in Ghaziabad. Accordingly, on the night of 30 April 2009 the enemy massed a force of approximately 200 fighters equipped with small arms and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) launchers in their de facto sanctuary areas in the Helgal and Tsunel valleys. Under cover of darkness the attackers moved forward from the west and north against the hilltop position.

On 1 May 2009 the Americans in northeastern Afghanistan were within weeks of the end of their year-long deployment when the insurgents struck at OP Bari Alai. The action started at about 0430 local time when an enemy force located between 1,000 and 500 meters west of OP Bari Alai began firing on the outpost with small arms, heavy machine guns, and RPGs from multiple positions. The senior advisor and only American on the team, Staff Sergeant William Vile, immediately reported the contact and requested fire from the 155-mm guns at FOB Bostick and the 120-mm mortars at VPB Tsunel onto several prearranged targets close to the enemy positions. Vile adjusted these fires as they came in. While doing so, Vile, a veteran of four tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, including one in the nearby volatile Korengal Valley less than two years before, also fired the OP's automatic grenade launcher.<sup>6</sup>

While Vile's attention was drawn to the north and northeast where the bulk of the insurgent fire was coming from, an enemy assault force of roughly 15 individuals advanced on the outpost from the northwest and southeast, the latter along a spur that had been protected by a small security detachment until a few days previous. Within ten minutes the assault force attacked the OP from two directions, making its way through the perimeter wire barrier directly towards the bunkers that made up the observation post proper. While manning the radio and adjusting fires, Vile soon found himself in a close firefight. Vile and one of the Latvian advisors, Sergeant Voldemars Ansevics, resisted fiercely as the insurgents fought their way toward the OP.<sup>7</sup>

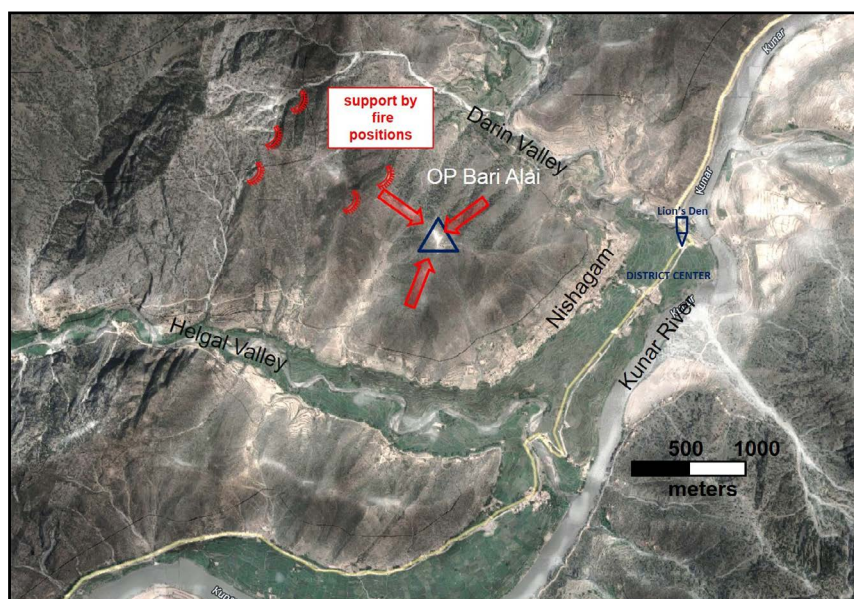


Figure 3. The Attack. Created by author.

Over the next 12 minutes as the enemy advanced onto the outpost, Ansevics was wounded in the arm from small arms fire as he defended the bunker where all of the US and Latvian soldiers, except one, were now positioned. After being treated by Sergeant Solvita Levane, the Latvian medic, Ansevics returned to the bunker entrance to continue the fight, but was quickly killed by a machine gun burst to his chest. Another Latvian trooper, Private Andrei Markusevs, then moved to the bunker entrance to take Ansevics' place. Vile

continued to fight and report on the radio despite receiving a minor wound. In addition to adjusting mortar and artillery fire, he requested helicopter and fixed wing support and called for the firing of the prearranged last ditch artillery barrage, almost on top of the OP. An Air Force F-15 attack aircraft was already overhead and a Predator drone would arrive in a matter of minutes, followed by a pair of Apache attack helicopters.<sup>8</sup>

A large explosion, possibly from an RPG round, ignited a stockpile of rocket ammunition, and collapsed the bunker position manned by the Latvians and Americans. The blast also killed Markusevs and an interpreter, and buried Sergeant Levane in the rubble of the bunker. Levane was later rescued. Now under intense fire, the advisors fought until they were incapacitated or killed, slowing the enemy advance until aviation assets could come into play. At about the same time as the blast, or shortly thereafter, an RPG round struck and killed Vile and destroyed his radio. His last report was “we are blowing up.”<sup>9</sup> After the explosion that destroyed the bunker, the two 6-4th Cav troopers manning the signal station, Sergeant James D. Pirtle and Specialist Ryan C. King were killed by enemy small arms fire.<sup>10</sup>

Outside the bunker, the insurgent attack force, dressed in ANA uniforms and black knit caps, called for the surrender of the surviving garrison. Eleven ANA soldiers and a surviving interpreter were captured as a result. By this time Apache attack helicopters and F-15s had arrived and were engaging the nearby enemy positions. Due to the rapid response of the US air support and the resistance put up by Vile and Ansevics, the enemy did not have time to conduct a thorough search of the OP. Fearing an immediate counterattack or the fires of the aircraft overhead, the insurgent force quickly withdrew with their prisoners, moving down into the inner regions of the Helgal Valley. In their haste to leave the OP, the insurgents left behind Levane, another Latvian soldier, and four ANA soldiers. In the attack two Latvians, three Americans and five Afghans had been killed.<sup>11</sup>

Vile’s reports had prompted Lieutenant Colonel Markert to action at FOB Bostick. Markert had retained a reserve for emergencies such as the attack on OP Bari Alai from part of his headquarters unit and a platoon detached from his C Troop. As per prearranged planning based on shared understanding between Markert and his subordinate commanders, these forces were marshalled as a quick reaction force (QRF) and within half an hour were flying by helicopter to the battle area, personally led by Markert. This massing of forces in one small area was an example of prudent decision-making that mitigated risk. Most of the troops used in the counterattack had been held in reserve for emergencies or came from quiet areas, so the current situation in terms of garrisons was otherwise left unchanged. The counterattack by the QRF was inherently risky, because had the enemy struck elsewhere, at that time there would be few forces available to respond quickly. But it was prudent as intelligence estimates of insurgent capabilities indicated it was very unlikely they could mount two large attacks at the same time in different areas with the number of fighters available to them. As it was, the enemy did attack OP Tsunel with a smaller force several days later. Alerted and ready, this OP’s garrison was able to repulse the attack.<sup>12</sup>

While an AH-64 fired on the enemy forces that had retreated into the rough terrain of the Helgal Valley west of the OP, Markert’s force arrived at a landing zone near the OP while another force from C Troop drove down from VPB Tsunel to the district center. These two forces converged on the OP site by 0900 while an F-15 conducted air strikes against the retreating enemy. Markert also moved the squadron’s tactical command post to the reoccupied observation post. Several hours later a platoon from the nearby 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry (1-32d IN), arrived by air at the OP via helicopter from COP Monti to the south. Additional ANA forces arrived by road and helicopter as well. By noon the combined force of about 200 US and ANA forces began conducting sweeps to the west into the mouth of the Helgal Valley, designed to both punish the insurgents and to rescue the captured ANA soldiers.

The brazen attack had set off a combined response, mostly involving ANA forces supported by elements of the (3d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, or TF Duke) available ground combat battalions, the 6-4th Cav, 1-26th IN, and the 1-32d IN. Later the same day, an ANA commando company with Special Forces advisers conducted an air assault deep into the Helgal Valley to set up a blocking position.



This force would serve as the anvil which would be struck by the hammer – two US Army companies with ANA units pushing west into the valley.<sup>13</sup>

Over the next four days, two Afghan National Army battalions, supported by two American companies and personally supervised by their corps commander, conducted clearing operations in the Helgal Valley, which included the insertion of specialized Commando troops to create another blocking position. Skirmishes with insurgent forces were frequent as the combined US-ANA force moved farther into the valley. As previously mentioned, at 2300 on 3 May, 85 insurgent fighters attacked OP Tsunel East, probably to distract Coalition forces in the Helgal. The joint 24-man American-Afghan garrison of the OP, however, routed the attackers, inflicting heavy casualties in the process.<sup>14</sup>

The attack on OP Bari Alai, the operations into the Helgal Valley, and the repulse of the enemy attack on OP Tsunel East, significantly weakened the insurgent forces in the region. Meanwhile, there was intense pressure through unofficial channels from local tribal elders and Afghan governmental officials to release the captured ANA soldiers. Simultaneous with this influence was a major military push to find the missing ANA troops that began on the morning of 6 May. Within two hours of the beginning of the new operation, however, in an attempt to reduce the force placed on them, the insurgents released the captured ANA soldiers, putting them into several pick-up trucks and driving them down to Nishagam. Apparently the Afghan soldiers were not executed because the fighters feared turning the local population against them.<sup>15</sup>

Markert's unit redeployed to its home station of Fort Riley, Kansas several weeks later. Before leaving, the unit renamed the nascent patrol base at the end of the Tsunel Valley as "Combat Outpost Pirtle-King" after the two 6-4th Cav troopers killed at OP Bari Alai. Follow-on units placed a US platoon at OP Bari Alai. More troops became available after the unit that replaced the 6-4th Cav abandoned the two outposts in Nuristan, COP Keating, and COP Lowell, following a large enemy attack on Keating in October 2009. Ghaziabad, particularly along the Kunar River road, remained an area plagued by active combat.

The success of the operation at Bari Alai depended significantly on the use of mission command principles by Lieutenant Colonel Markert and his subordinate commanders. Typically the higher commander gives the subordinate a specific mission and commander's intent to conduct a specific operation. In the unique context of northeastern Afghanistan, the relatively static nature of unit deployments operations were of a routine ongoing nature, usually extending for the entirety of a unit's rotation (and sometimes beyond). In this case, elements of the commander's intent, consisting of a general standard way of doing things (rather than specified guidance), existed before the assignment of more specific missions, which were situationally dependent. As part of this standard, a system of response to unexpected enemy actions was also in place to allow for rapid execution of relief and the employment of support assets. Accordingly, commanders such as Markert only had to issue general instructions to execute a complicated operation that resulted in an effective response. A QRF and support assets merely needed to be told the objective of the operation and the commander's intended endstate prior to being dispatched. Fire support elements simply needed to be given a target and the desired effects. In this way Markert could easily and quickly issue mission orders and his commander's intent and expect his units to do the right thing in a very rapid manner.

Other mission command principles illustrated in this operation included the acceptance of prudent risk and the establishment of shared understanding. In the former case, as previously mentioned, because of the availability of a limited number of troops, commanders were forced to accept risk in certain areas, such as Ghaziabad, where the enemy was usually less active or there was a smaller population base. To make the risk of a limited number of troops in a relatively large area prudent, Army commanders established systems, including the creation of quick reaction forces, availability of on-station fixed air assets, and the ability to rapidly deploy limited attack helicopter assets. All these factors were present in the Bari Alai relief operation.

Shared understanding was also necessary due to the routine nature of combat and counterinsurgency operations and the system of emergency response. Subordinates had to understand why and how they were



to reinforce threatened outposts. The garrisons of such sites also had to trust that their superiors would be able to reinforce them and respond to battlefield crises quickly and effectively. The Bari Alai scenario clearly shows that understanding had been created not only within units but among Coalition forces. The OP, while unable to repulse the attackers with its mostly inexperienced and untrained Afghan garrison, did warn Markert and his superiors that a large enemy force was present and operating in the area. The response was so immediate and effective that the attackers were forced to quickly abandon both their gains and later their prisoners in order to escape the effects of Coalition maneuver and firepower against their massed forces. In this way, arguably, the practice of mission command prevented a far worse outcome for Coalition and Afghan troops.

The response to the attack on Bari Alai proved that long term systems and troop placements prescribed under mission command principles and common in counterinsurgency operations were as relevant in such environments as they are in more conventional operations. Without such systems in place commanders would have been forced continually to improvise responses which would make such responses slower and more risky as troops may have been taken haphazardly from areas where they were still needed. Without the practice of mission command principles, operations in northeastern Afghanistan in 2009 might have resulted in less effectiveness and more casualties.

## Notes

1. COL Christopher Kolenda, interview by Lynne Chandler-Garcia, US Army Combat Studies Institute, 30 January 2009, 4, 7; "Ashvakan Kambojas Gave Their Name to Afghans, Afghanistan," *Punjab Network*, (27 August 2004), <http://www.punjabi.net/forum/showthread.php?t=911&page=5> (accessed on 24 September 2015); "UNHCR Sub-Office Jalalabad District Profile for Kamdesh District, Nuristan," (11 November 2002) [http://www.aims.org.af/afg/dist\\_profiles/unhcr\\_district\\_profiles/eastern/nuristan/kamdesh.pdf](http://www.aims.org.af/afg/dist_profiles/unhcr_district_profiles/eastern/nuristan/kamdesh.pdf) (accessed on 24 September 2015); 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry, "AO Saber 27 May 07- 25 Jul 08," PowerPoint presentation, 24 November 2008, slides 27-28.
2. LTC James Markert, interview by Steven Clay, US Army Combat Studies Institute, 24 January 2011, 6.
3. Markert interview, 24.
4. TF Rock (2-503d IN), "Wildcat CLP Ambush 180900z July 2008," PowerPoint Presentation, 19 July 2008; Markert interview, 23.
5. James Markert, sworn statement, FOB Bostick, Afghanistan, 11 May 2009; Markert interview, 11, 25.
6. US Army, Narrative accompanying award of Silver Star Medal, SSG William Vile, 17 May 2011; COL Spiszer comments to Combat Studies Institute draft manuscript "Different Kind of War III," 9 June 2011.
7. Lieutenant Colonel James C. Markert, Comments on Chapter 4 Extract, 9 May 2011, 12; Captain Daniel E. Voss, DA Form 2823, Sworn Statement, 7 May 2009; Silver Star Award Narrative for SSG William D. Vile. The automatic grenade launcher (GMG or grenade machine gun) was an ANA weapon system similar to the American Mark-19 automatic grenade launcher.
8. Silver Star Award Narrative for SSG William D. Vile; Lieutenant Colonel James C. Markert, DA Form 2823, Sworn Statement, 11 May 2009.
9. Silver Star Award Narrative for SSG William D. Vile.
10. Lieutenant Colonel James C. Markert, Sworn Statement, 11 May 2009; Silver Star Award Narrative for Staff Sergeant William D. Vile; Colonel John M. Spiszer, Comments on Chapter 4 Extract, Bari Alai, 24 May 2011, 2; Lieutenant Colonel James C. Markert, Comments on Chapter 4 Extract, OP Bari Ali Rewrite, Version 2, 10 June 2011, 2. The Silver Star award narrative and Markert's sworn statement differ on details of the death Sergeant Ansevics. The narrative says that Ansevics was killed by an RPG, but both Markert and Spiszer stated that the sergeant was killed by machine gun fire. Captain Voss' sworn statement indicates that the sergeant was shot in the head. The narrative also indicates that Vile was killed in the bunker explosion, but Spiszer and Market indicated that Vile was struck by an RPG round. The sergeant's wounds seem to agree with the latter version. The rounds were for the Carl Gustav, a Swedish-made recoilless rifle similar to the old US bazooka.
11. First Lieutenant Agris Robeznieks, Sworn Statement, 9 May 2009; Spiszer comments; Lieutenant Colonel James C. Markert, Sworn Statement, 11 May 2009.
12. Markert interview, 7.
13. Lieutenant Colonel Brett Jenkinson, interview by Contemporary Operations Study Team, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 9 and 11 February 2011, 14.
14. Spiszer comments, 3.
15. Markert interview, 17.

## Chapter 13

### The Water Principle for Accepting Risk

Colonel Michael D. Higginbotham

*Military tactics are like unto water; for water in its natural course runs away from high places and hastens downwards... Water shapes its course according to the nature of the ground over which it flows; the soldier works out his victory in relation to the foe whom he is facing. Therefore, just as water retains no constant shape, so in warfare there are no constant conditions. He who can modify his tactics in relation to his opponent and thereby succeed in winning, may be called a heaven-born captain. – Sun Tzu*

Around mid-afternoon, the Navy SEAL Troop Commander arrived at my aviation task force headquarters. We were meeting to plan for an upcoming air assault into the Panjwai District, located west of Kandahar, Afghanistan. With the start of the fighting season looming, the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) headquarters desired to keep the levels of violence low. Better stability in the region would allow the US forces to retrograde their equipment and to transfer the security responsibilities to the Afghan National Security Forces. The plan for the next few months was to eliminate the weapons and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) cached by the insurgents within the district for their use during the fighting season. Special operations teams paired with helicopters were the method of choice to raid the suspected cache sites identified in the intelligence collection process. The upcoming mission was straightforward: air assault to the objective, destroy the IED cache site, capture the IED facilitator, and return to home base. However, nothing in combat is easy.

As both the aviation task force commander and the air assault task force commander, my organization had the dual role of both providing the aircraft for the mission and commanding the overall operation.<sup>1</sup> The organization for combat of the small task force centered on the ground unit, with about 40 special operators, along with two CH-47F Chinook helicopters for the insertion and two AH-64D Apache helicopters in direct support for security. Rounding out the capabilities were MEDEVAC and a downed aircraft recovery team in general support. The objective for this mission was the reported IED cache site in a small cluster of houses located south of the Arghandab River in the Panjwai District. Analysis of the terrain showed the village was circular with open areas in the center and surrounded by farms. The fields in the central courtyard and those outside the village perimeter were suitable landing zones for the Chinook helicopters. Intelligence reports for the mission did not pinpoint which house contained the cache, and this implied the SEALs would have to clear and search each building. Unmanned aerial vehicle surveillance video showed there were between six and eight families living in the village. Reporting indicated that the military-aged males were experienced fighters with access to small arms and machine guns. However, the most significant intelligence report showed there were several hundred IEDs buried in the fields surrounding the perimeter of the village.

This tactical problem yielded two feasible courses of action, both with a significant amount of risk. The first choice was to land the Chinooks offset from the village with the ground force infiltrating on foot through the IEDs to the target. It was a CJTF-level standard operating procedure to land the aircraft a significant distance from any building during air assaults. This tactic reduced the chances of small arms engagements against the helicopters while they were on the ground. However, in this case the requirement increased the risk to the ground unit. Landing away from the target had the potential to alert the enemy thereby losing the element of surprise. More important, the ground force faced the high possibility of a SEAL encountering an IED with catastrophic results. The second option was to deviate from the standard procedure and land the helicopters inside the village in the open clearing. After touchdown, the special operators would move to the buildings and search for the IED cache. The risk to the ground unit was much lower with the main hazard being small arms engagements in the open areas between the helicopters and the houses. Differing from the first course of action, the risk to the helicopters in this plan was much higher. The nearness of the landing zone to the village buildings increased the chance of insurgents engaging the aircraft with catastrophic

results. Both courses of action exposed the assault force to danger and both were uncertain in their success depending on the enemy's reactions. As the commander with mission command authority, I faced the question: Did these courses of action offer us any opportunities to exploit enemy weaknesses by deliberately exposing our forces to potential loss? This dilemma is the central concept underlying the mission command principle of *accept prudent risk*.

Risk management, decision-making, and mission command are inextricably linked. To understand this relationship and to solve the problem described above, one must understand the fundamentals of mission command and how accepting risk fits into military decision-making. Broadly speaking, mission command is the Army's selected style of command.<sup>2</sup> The formal definition of mission command is "the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations."<sup>3</sup> It emphasizes initiative and decentralized execution while focusing on mission accomplishment within commander's intent. Higher commanders issue the overarching mission orders and define the end state for the operation. Subordinate leaders use their understanding of the tactical situation to create opportunities and then use their disciplined initiative to exploit the enemy's weaknesses. Throughout all operations, commanders use the art of command to "exercise their authority through timely decision-making and leadership."<sup>4</sup> The art of command accounts for the human dimension in military conflict, and as such commanders must use their judgment when making decisions. Judgment is used to assess information and draw feasible conclusions. Commanders use judgment to "identify, accept, and mitigate risk; prioritize resources; and delegate authority."<sup>5</sup> Mission command shapes how commanders make decisions, which in turn will determine the actions of their force. Ultimately, the linkage between accepting risk, making decisions, and mission command can be summarized as "knowing if, when, and what to decide and understanding the consequences of that decision."<sup>6</sup>

There are six principles that guide commanders in the philosophy of mission command. Out of the six, the one applicable principle that applies to decisions regarding risk, is *accept prudent risk*.<sup>7</sup> As stated earlier, every military operation is uncertain in its outcome. With this uncertainty, commanders must use their best judgment to maneuver their organizations to gain tactical advantage over the enemy while the enemy is attempting to do the same. Military operations are inherently hazardous. The prudent commander understands that the deliberate exposure of their Soldiers to risk is necessary. The amount of risk commanders will accept depends on whether they judge the benefits to mission accomplishment are worth the cost of the potential losses. Formally defined, "prudent risk is a deliberate exposure to potential injury or loss when the commander judges the outcome in terms of mission accomplishment as worth the cost."<sup>8</sup> To emphasize the important idea about this principle of mission command, accepting prudent risk does not imply that all risks are mitigated to their lowest possible levels. This concept takes a more nuanced approach focused on "creating opportunities rather than simply preventing defeat – even when preventing defeat appears safer."<sup>9</sup> The key to accepting the right level of risk is understanding how to create the opportunities needed to expose an enemy's weakness while at the same time balancing the risks to their own units. Commanders accomplish this by using their judgment, experience, and the doctrinal principles of risk management.

While not part of mission command, the Army's risk management procedures outlined in ATP 5-19 *Risk Management* apply directly to the mission command principle of accepting prudent risk. There are four risk management principles: *integrate risk management into all phases of missions and operations, make risk decisions at the appropriate level, accept no unnecessary risk, and apply risk management cyclically and continuously*.<sup>10</sup> The principle, *make risk decisions at the appropriate level*, defines two important concepts in the context of how commanders should accept prudent risk. The first is the idea of a *risk decision*. It is a commander's "determination to accept or not accept the risk(s) associated with an action he or she will take or will direct others to take."<sup>11</sup> The second idea is one of risk tolerance, which is the "level of risk the responsible commander is willing to accept."<sup>12</sup> Also notice that the mission command principle of *accept prudent risk* is similar to the risk management concept of *accept no unnecessary risk*. The semantic

difference between the two is that the mission command principle focuses on creating opportunities by accepting risk, while the risk management principle focuses on preserving combat power by minimizing exposure to hazards. Regardless, both principles focus on balancing the costs versus the benefits and enabling commanders to conduct risky operations when necessary. These ideas combine into a decision making cycle. The commander continuously evaluates the operational environment, looks for opportunities to exploit, determines whether the hazards associated with the maneuver of his forces are still within risk tolerance, and when necessary makes additional risk decisions to accept, or not accept, the new risks in the operation.

The theory covering prudent risk and making risk decisions is straightforward. The challenge is how to apply these concepts during uncertain and complex combat operations. To help make sense of all the concepts and principles for risk management, I use what I think of as the “water principle for accepting risk.” The analogy is a flowing stream of water. The water’s natural course moves from high ground downward, shaping its flow in relation to the environment. If the path is not desirable and one attempts to block the flow of water, it changes its course to the path of least resistance and continues flowing. Water will always move toward the low ground regardless of how many blocks one places in its path. The best we can do is channel the water along the path of our choice by blocking the least desirable directions. Managing risk in a military operation is the same. In our analogy, the natural course is the current operating environment relative to the terrain, enemy, and environment and how the mission shaped by these factors. The commander must understand the hazards and opportunities within the mission relative to the operating environment and their effects on each unit. Every decision the commander makes adds or removes blocks in the water’s path, changing the course of how the mission unfolds. Similar to our inability to stop water flowing, we can never remove all risks from an operation. The best we can do is mitigate the most dangerous hazards and accept the prudent risks that create opportunities. With each risk decision, we must ask ourselves two questions: does accepting this risk allow us to exploit an enemy weakness, and where does the risk transfer to if this action is executed? If the risk transfers to a different organization, we must evaluate their risk tolerance and ability to accomplish the mission in those conditions. Once we understand the hazards, opportunities, and second order effects of our actions, we can choose the course of action (or the desired path in our analogy) that results in acceptable levels of risk for each unit involved and that best accomplishes our mission.

The Navy SEAL air assault vignette described earlier illustrates how the water principle for accepting risk works during an actual operation. For both courses of action, the fundamentals of mission command were in place. Higher headquarters issued a clear mission order giving my task force the complete autonomy to execute this operation. The higher commander’s intent described the desired end state in detail and, given the importance, established a high-risk tolerance for the operation. We were building our understanding of the terrain, enemy, and environment through Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB), requests for information on enemy patterns of life, and a technical analysis of the suspected IED belt surrounding the village. The time selected for the mission was last dark, just before sunrise. This allowed the aircraft to land under cover of darkness with the rest of the mission in daylight. What remained was the risk decision on how to insert the ground force.

As noted earlier, the first option was to land the aircraft away from the village, outside the IED belt and out of range of any machine guns or small arms weapons. After landing, the SEALs would move by foot across the roads and fields containing the IEDs to the target village. The first step was to determine the hazards and opportunities with this action. The risk to the aviation unit was minimal while the danger to the ground unit was much higher. The landing away from the target risked the element of surprise and had the high chance of a SEAL striking an IED. Despite having access to other technical capabilities, there were no effective means to mitigate the danger of moving through the IED belt. Lastly, we did not gain any opportunities or advantages over the enemy in this plan. With the hazards and opportunities understood, we must now ask the two questions: does accepting this risk allow us to exploit an enemy weakness, and where does the risk transfer to if this action is executed? The option of landing away from the village did not exploit

any enemy weaknesses, while at the same time transferred a significant amount of risk to the ground force. This flow of the risk away from the aviation unit to the ground force exceeded the risk tolerance level for the SEALs and placed them in a circumstance that jeopardized their mission accomplishment.

The next course of action was to land the aircraft in the middle of the village. Once on the ground, the SEALs would clear the buildings and look for the IED cache and facilitator. Analyzing this plan shows a substantial difference in the hazards and opportunities. The earlier description of this action indicated the risk to the SEALs was primarily small arms fire while the danger to the helicopters was much higher. Landing in close proximity to the village buildings placed the aircraft in range of the insurgent's machine guns and small arms weapons. Fortunately, there were options available to us to mitigate some of the risk during the insertion. We intentionally chose early dawn as the insertion time because the pattern of life analysis showed almost no activity in the village at that early hour. In case of insurgent activity, the AH-64D Apache attack aircraft escorting the Chinooks would be in a position to suppress any insurgents attempting to shoot at the helicopters. Finally, this plan's design offered us two key opportunities to exploit. The first was speed and surprise. The rapid movement of the ground force at an unexpected time to the objective gave the SEALs a distinct advantage. The second opportunity was massing the effects of the ground force's combat power with interior lines on the target. Consolidated and in a position of tactical advantage, they could rapidly overwhelm any insurgent resistance. With the hazards and opportunities analyzed, we ask again the two questions: does accepting this risk allow us to exploit an enemy weakness, and where does the risk transfer to if this action is executed? In this plan, we gained positional advantage over the enemy and the element of surprise. The other benefit of this action was the risks were more evenly balanced. We reduced the hazards to the ground force but caused the risk to flow to the aviation unit. However, these dangers were mitigated and the overall risk remained within risk tolerance levels for each unit. The result was an acceptable plan that both organizations could complete.

As the task force commander with mission command authority over the operation, this risk decision was mine to make. Both options exposed Soldiers and SEALs to dangers and neither guaranteed success. The question was, did any course of action offer us opportunities to exploit an enemy weakness by accepting prudent risk? This dilemma also illustrates the linkage between risk management, decision-making, and mission command. In the mission command, decision-making is part of the art of command. Using judgment, commanders "identify, accept, and mitigate risk" in their decisions. By accepting prudent risk to their Soldiers, commanders can expose enemy weakness that can be exploited. If these opportunities are within risk tolerance, then the commander can take disciplined initiative to accomplish their mission. Woven throughout this decision-making process is the constant evaluation of mission benefit versus potential losses. With an understanding of the costs versus benefits, commanders can create opportunities instead of just preventing defeat. Lastly, with judgment and understanding, commanders will know what decisions to make and will understand the consequences of those decisions.

These concepts framed my decision, and what I think of as the "water principle for accepting risk" helped me visualize the resulting second order effects of this mission. With an understanding of how the levels of risk changed, or flowed, between units in the two proposed plans, we were able to recognize the unacceptable risk in one and the tactical opportunities in the other. The mission was executed using the plan to land in the center of the village. By exposing the aircraft to risk, the ground force gained complete surprise over the insurgents. After waking up, the insurgents walked to the perimeter of the village. When the aircraft landed, the ground force was fortuitously positioned between the men and where they kept their weapons. All surrendered without a shot fired, the IED cache was located and destroyed, and the facilitator was captured. The outcome in terms of mission accomplishment was worth the cost.

## Notes

1. As a point of reference, it is unusual for the aviation task force commander to serve as the overarching air assault task force commander but my organization provided the bulk of the assets and, more importantly, I had a good communications architecture that put me in the best position to command and control the operation.
2. The other style of command commonly used is detailed command. Detailed command is characterized by the centralization of information and decision-making. Orders and plans are detailed and require strict obedience to orders for success. Subordinate commanders are not expected to independently take the initiative. US Department of the Army, Field Manual 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces* (Washington DC: US Department of the Army, Aug 11, 2003), 1-16.
3. Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22, *Army Leadership*, Change 2, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 28 March 2014), 1-1.
4. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-22, 2-5.
5. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-22, 2-9.
6. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-22, 2-7.
7. The six principles of mission command are: build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide a clear commander's intent, exercise disciplined initiative, use mission orders, and accept prudent risk. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-22, 2-1.
8. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-22, 2-5.
9. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-22, 2-5.
10. Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-19, *Risk Management*, Change 1, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 8 September 2014), 1-1.
11. Department of the Army, ATP 5-19, 1-1.
12. Department of the Army, ATP 5-19, 1-2.





## Chapter 14

### Mission Command in the Modern Army Garrison

Major Kristofer D. Fosmoe

The philosophy of mission command guides Army leaders *in the conduct of unified land operations*.<sup>1</sup> The principles of mission command guide Army leaders in balancing the art of command with the science of control during combat operations and mission training. Army leaders accept that mission command is effective in unifying the warfighting functions toward mission accomplishment. This creates a striking paradox within the Army. How can leaders practice a philosophy so effectively in combat and disregard it in a garrison environment when attempting to generate health and discipline?

This paper is not the first to highlight the cultural dissonance of mission command in the garrison environment. In 2013, The Army Leader Development Task Force reported “a large part of our force is functioning – or perceived by a large part of the force to be functioning – in a command environment that is not guided by the principles of mission command.”<sup>2</sup> While the individual practice of leadership is central to mission command, this paper focuses on the structural conditions that guide leader decisions. Garrison environments are different from combat, and the activities of generating healthy and disciplined Soldiers are different from executing Decisive Action. However, if the Army is to successfully embed the principles of mission command, it must find a method for managing the health and discipline of Soldiers guided by mission command, not by detailed command.

In an effort to further embed mission command in garrison leadership, this paper describes some of the challenges to the practice of mission command in a garrison environment, and advocates for the further institutionalization of the philosophy of mission command. This begins by recognizing that there is a difference between the primary function of a garrison environment and the unit environment while deployed. A useful simplification might be to understand that the primary function of unit leaders while deployed is the accomplishment of a tactical mission. The primary mission accomplished in a garrison environment is ensuring readiness through training. Army leaders ensure readiness through a healthy and disciplined force using a number of programs, governed by policies and regulations.

### Current System

Army regulations serve as the vehicle for two principles of mission command. They create shared understanding of the operating environment and provide a clear commander’s intent. In addition to Army regulations, the Army creates shared understanding of health and discipline through white papers, task force studies, and command guidance. A total accounting and discussion of each program is well beyond the scope of this paper. However, the Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP), and the Army Body Composition Program (ABCP) embody some of the challenges in practicing mission command in garrison, and serve as a lens for further analysis. By specifying, in detail, the actions required by company commanders from the Department of the Army level, health promoting program regulations interrupt the practice of mission command in the Army garrison.

One of the primary impediments to creating shared understanding within health and discipline is the volume of program regulations that exist. The Army took a significant step in addressing this challenge by introducing the Ready and Resilient Campaign (R2C) in 2013. R2C integrates several distinct, but mutually supporting programs into a coherent framework. Prior to R2C, programs (like ASAP and ABCP) established training and directives to increase the readiness of Soldiers without visibility into the interactions among the different health promoting programs. This resulted in leaders managing a growing number of training and reporting requirements, without an understanding of the impact on the organization. R2C is the first modern effort to integrate and synchronize the entire system of programs aimed at improving Soldier readiness.<sup>3</sup> This effort is a condition for embedding mission command in health and discipline, but by itself is insufficient.

If R2C is the strategic structure for creating understanding, the Army needs an operational structure to prioritize requirements, translate strategic goals into tactical actions, and measure effectiveness. The Community Health Promotion Council (CHPC) is the current operational level forum for the senior commander at Army installations to practice mission command in health and discipline. The CHPC develops and implements preventative interventions that target the health of the Total Army population. CHPC functional working groups develop interventions, including programs, policy changes, and resources. Additionally, the CHPC develops the means to assess the health needs of the population, and monitor the effectiveness of interventions.<sup>4</sup> The CHPC is a standard model, but its focus for improvement is flexible and adapted by each senior commander, according to the needs of the installation population. This is a transformational step toward the practice of mission command, using a flexible system to create shared understanding of the operating environment.

## **System Challenges**

The previous section described the current major elements in the practice of ensuring Soldier health and discipline. The three major elements of Army regulations, the ready and resilient campaign, and the CHPC, interact to inform the decisions of commanders in maintaining Soldier readiness. The primary challenge rests in the style of leadership that guides the interactions of these elements. Even after implementation of the CHPC, Army health and discipline regulations leave little room for subordinate commanders to exercise disciplined initiative. The preference toward detailed command over mission command within health and discipline is widespread. It is ineffective in achieving its desired result, and has negative impacts on the profession.

The style of leadership that runs through the majority of health and discipline regulations is detailed command in nature. Army regulations attempt to provide “a systematic approach to enforce military standards.”<sup>5</sup> In order to provide a systematic method, Army regulations prescribe a detailed checklist that attempts to capture all the possible scenarios and actions the commander will take when encountered with these scenarios. This framework of command has its place – but not in health and discipline. The Army applies a detailed command framework to the preventative maintenance of vehicles with success. In an environment where the relationships between the cause and effect are stable and deterministic, detailed command ensures lower level leaders take the correct actions to achieve the best results. The Army’s preference of mission command in tactical mission accomplishment recognizes that tactical situations are not determined in advance. Do we not believe that the way to generate good order and discipline is as much a complicated set of interactions as tactical situations? If the Army could reduce the solution for good order and discipline to a checklist, it would find less need for its incredible investment in personnel and leadership.

In addition to the intent of regulations, the preference to detailed command is also evident in the application of Army health and discipline regulations. It is worth mentioning that while Army leaders are encouraged to apply doctrine to the situation, the Army intends that health and discipline regulations be followed without regard to the circumstance. This is best illustrated within two Army truisms. The first being, “Don’t fight the plan, fight the enemy.” The second being, “Commanders can add to regulations, but may not take away.” In an Army inspired by mission command in health and discipline, an appropriate tag line might be, “Care about the unit and the Soldier more than you care about the regulation.”

Consider the use of language in Army doctrine that guides mission accomplishment contrasted with regulations guiding health and discipline. Army health and discipline guiding documents contain the phrase “commander will” two to ten times more often than documents guiding mission accomplishment. Army documents that reference mission accomplishment use the word “considerations” two to three times more than those regarding health and discipline.<sup>6</sup> These phrases illustrate a preference for mission command in guiding Army leaders to tactical mission accomplishment, but a preference for detailed command in health and discipline.

The phrase “commander will” directs subordinate commanders how to do a task, while the word “considerations” provides principles and guidelines for subordinate commanders *to consider* without directing action. Directing subordinate commander actions in itself does not conflict with the practice of the philosophy of mission command to balance the art of command with the science of control. However, the relative rates at which the different documents use these two phrases illustrate the Army’s preference for controlling subordinate commander action to promote health and discipline in the force.

The previous chapters highlight the current leadership philosophy guiding Army leaders in Soldier health and discipline favors detailed command over mission command. This duality in leadership styles is a problem. Detailed command is ineffective in achieving the desired results in Soldier health and discipline, and has negative consequences for the Army profession.

Despite the Army’s preference for mission command, detailed command may be preferred in some areas within the Army: areas where the mechanistic links between cause and effect are known; and areas where authorities cannot be delegated or are more appropriate to command in a detailed manner. Artillery crew drills and materiel maintenance activities may be appropriate for detailed command. Detailed instructions for the execution of crew drills ensure that artillery units conduct accurate, predicted fire. Also, the link between hours of materiel operation and required services seems appropriate for detailed command. There is a stable, deterministic cause and effect relationship between services and materiel operation. On the other hand, Army leaders cannot prescribe the detailed actions that change Soldier behavior to ensure Soldier well-being and readiness. Even if they could, the cause and effect of one action would be different from Soldier to Soldier. Therefore, the best way to achieve the objective of Soldier readiness is through mission command – building trust, creating shared understanding, and clarifying commander’s intent.

## **Recommendations**

The current system that enables commanders to generate health and discipline has significant challenges within the Army leadership philosophy of mission command. To address these problems, three broad principles of mission command provide areas of focus for the current set of programs and regulations. First and most important is creating a culture of trust. Second is creating shared understanding of the problem, rather than on prescribing check-list solutions for every action. Finally, Army leaders should encourage disciplined initiative to meet the commander’s intent. Given the numerous efforts required in the health and discipline of Soldiers, the commander must provide focus and accept prudent risk.

The most insidious effect of ineffective mission command in health and discipline is the impact on trust within the command. Wong and Gerras describe the effects on Army officers operating in a system that forces commanders into ethical dilemmas given the increasing numbers of compliance-based regulations. They note “untruthfulness is surprisingly common in the U.S. military.”<sup>7</sup> Commanders can discern if the training requirement passed down from higher headquarters is important or if they merely have to represent it was completed. This inhibits a culture of trust if junior leaders are only completing training requirements to check the box.

To the end of incorporating mission command into our garrison environment, Army regulations and training requirements need to adapt. Army regulations should focus on providing commanders authority to change behavior, rather than directives on what they must do in every situation. Army health and discipline training needs to be analyzed for duplication in requirements. Furthermore, measures of performance must be verified that they actually lead to some change in behavior. Otherwise allowing commanders to assess their units on effectiveness, similar to Mission Essential Task training, provides an alternative to forcing compliance consistent with mission command.

A common operating picture is an essential object for commanders to create shared understanding of the problem. Army health and discipline programs have paid little attention to creating systems that enable sharing data that creates a common understanding of the problem. The data currently collected in the ABCP

and ASAP is either in stove-piped systems or in formats that require significant effort to create meaning. Both of these issues create challenges for commanders in creating a shared understanding of the problems in Soldier health and discipline.

The Army has been aware of the problems with data silos related to health and discipline. Data silos result from one system element maintaining data that is not shared with other elements in the system. *The Red Book* identified that from 2004 to 2009 less than 70 percent of commanders were completing the required DA Form 4833, an essential court record for tracking disciplinary actions.<sup>8</sup> Systems that assist commanders in creating common understanding of a problem enable mission command. The Medical Protection System (MEDPROS) provides an effective example for the type of system that allows commanders to create common understanding, by shared access to data using an internet application.

The Army Body Composition Program has significant gaps in shared understanding of the problem across the Army. The current system for creating a personnel action flag limits commander's visibility into the process. The supporting documents to initiate a flag are kept in paper, often at the unit originating the flag. Without a coherent, user-friendly system to transfer these packets from one unit to another, it is no surprise that units who gain Soldiers on the ABCP do not have their supporting flag paperwork. In addition to providing a resource for subordinate commanders to perform their mission, a common operating picture of flag and subsequent counseling records must build shared understanding of the problem. Shared understanding of the problem would alert senior commanders when subordinate commanders are failing to conduct subsequent counseling. Commanders cannot access the required installation resources – a common complaint is access to the required nutritionist counseling, or when subordinate commanders are failing to initiate a separation when regulations require. Currently, the only way a commander can keep visibility of the process is through detailed inspections of counseling packets. While no system can substitute for inspections, the Army must create a modern system to close the significant gaps that exist within the current program.

Finally, the current set of regulations must focus on allowing commanders to exercise disciplined initiative within the intent of the program. One might assume that providing a commander with a requirement to train for a certain number of hours allows them flexibility to exercise initiative. However, in practice, standard training time coupled with standard training material stifles innovation and disciplined initiative. At the same time, senior commanders through the CHPC develop additional innovative programs at their level. Senior commanders do not remove duplicative requirements, but they typically add to the standard training material further deepening the deluge of requirements.

Transforming the system to resemble mission command more than detailed command requires a change in what constitutes “the standard.” Rather than a system that prescribes measures of performance for company commanders at the Department of the Army level, standards for effectiveness should be determined at the lowest appropriate level. The CHPC already provides senior commanders visibility into many health and discipline measures of effectiveness. Allowing senior commanders to determine what measures of effectiveness determine “the standard” for each program, and enabling them to exercise disciplined initiative to perform tasks to achieve the desired effect is more in line with mission command.

This transformation may be uncomfortable because the current system relies on checking compliance. Units collect sign-in rosters showing training time. Unit inspections can count the number of months a Soldier has been on the ABCP. A system that builds commitment to the principles of health and discipline may result in higher degrees of variation across installations and over time. However, the output of both systems is nearly identical. As an example, Army G-1 reports the number of ABCP separations increased from 460 in 2010 to 1,823 in 2013.<sup>9</sup> Should we believe that three times as many Soldiers are acting without the discipline to maintain their weight, or is it more reasonable to attribute this change to a command reaction? If the cause for the increase in separations is a command reaction, then commanders are responding to some higher command intent independent of the detailed command contained within Army regulations.

While some leaders have used these facts to indicate a loss of health and discipline, it also demonstrates the power of culture and mission command over detail command regulations. The transformation of the health and discipline system of regulations brings it more in line with mission command and the current culture of the Army.

There is still a gap in the understanding of the mission command philosophy in garrison leadership, particularly in the health and discipline of the force. Army health and discipline regulations attempt to force compliance and do little to foster commitment to the desired principle. Army leaders do not favor mission command for its own sake. Mission command is essential to developing agile and adaptive leaders who can win in a complex world. The operational environment at the tactical level presents Army leaders with many complex challenges. However, leaders encounter complex challenges every day in the Army garrison in generating healthy and disciplined Soldiers. Developing agile and adaptive leaders to meet the challenges of a complex world requires the Army embed mission command into mission execution and in generating health and discipline.

## Notes

1. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, May 2012), 1.
2. David H. Huntoon, Jr., et al, "2013 Chief of Staff of the Army Leader Development Task Force Final Report" (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 14 June 2013), 17.
3. John F. Campbell, LTG, Deputy Chief of Staff, G-3/5/7. "HQDA EXORD 110-13 Ready and Resilient Execution Order" (Washington, DC, Headquarters Department of the Army, 11 December 2013).
4. Department of the Army, AR 600-63, *Army Health Promotion* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 14 April 2015), 12-14.
5. Department of the Army, AR 600-9, *The Army Body Composition Program Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 28 June 2013), 3.
6. These statistics are internal research describing the relative rates of words, gathered through text mining several Army Regulations and Field Manuals.
7. Leonard Wong and Stephen J. Gerras, *Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, February 2015), ix.
8. Department of the Army, *Health Promotion, Risk Reduction, Suicide Prevention* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 61.
9. Michelle Tan, "SMA pushes for black socks, headphones with PT uniform," *Army Times*, (29 June 2015), <http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/careers/army/2015/06/29/dan-dailey-pushes-black-socks-headphones-pt/29290285/> (accessed 24 September 2015).

## Chapter 15

### Noncommissioned Officers and Mission Command<sup>1</sup>

Sergeant Major Dennis A. Eger

Army leadership recognizes the importance of forces being grounded in doctrine; doctrine contains the fundamental guiding principles for conducting current operations. Soldiers, on the other hand, may feel that the ideas in doctrine are theoretical and not applicable to their everyday tasks. However, today doctrine is more accessible and relevant to Soldiers than ever.

Since 2011, an effort known as Doctrine 2015 has been guiding a major reorganization and rewriting of Army doctrine to make it more useful to the force.<sup>2</sup> Not only has the content of doctrine been updated, but a new publications hierarchy has led to the transfer of certain doctrinal subjects from field manuals to new publication categories known as Army doctrine publications (ADPs) and Army doctrine reference publications (ADRP). Army mission command doctrine has moved to two new doctrinal publications that rightfully have garnered much attention since their release in 2012: ADP 6-0 and ADRP 6-0, both named *Mission Command*.<sup>3</sup>

Former Chief of Staff of the Army General Raymond Odierno on many occasions emphasized the importance of integrating the ideas in mission command doctrine into how the Army conducts operations at all levels of leadership. This level of visibility has caused some to question their role within mission command because if, according to doctrine, only commanders exercise or apply mission command, how is mission command doctrine relevant to everyone else? One group in particular seems to be struggling: the noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps. How is the Army's idea of mission command relevant to NCOs? What is the NCO's role?

All NCOs acknowledge that commanders command, and NCOs support them in the accomplishment of the mission. Given that thought process, many NCOs have difficulty envisioning their role in mission command. As I travel to camps, posts, and stations around the country, I continue to hear similar rumblings from our NCOs: "Mission command, that's an officer thing," or "That's officer business." This way of thinking can be no further from the truth. My response is always the same, "No, mission command is leader business."

As NCOs, and senior NCOs in particular, we must change the way we think about mission command. To accomplish this, we need to understand the basics of mission command and gain an appreciation for our role as NCOs within it. Then we can show our subordinates their part helping commanders apply its principles.

### **Mission Command Defined**

The Army's approach to mission command incorporates three main concepts commanders apply to overcome the complex challenges of military operations. NCOs have a direct role in supporting commanders' application of these concepts, described in ADP 6-0 and ADRP 6-0 as the exercise of mission command, the mission command philosophy, and the mission command warfighting function. The exercise of mission command refers to an overarching idea that unifies the philosophy of command and the warfighting function. The philosophy of command has six guiding principles, and the warfighting function is divided into tasks and systems.

*The philosophy of mission command.* Mission command (the philosophy) is "the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations."<sup>4</sup> The principles of mission command are:

- Build cohesive teams through trust
- Create shared understanding
- Provide a clear commander's intent
- Exercise disciplined initiative
- Use mission orders
- Accept prudent risk<sup>5</sup>

*The mission command warfighting function.* The mission command warfighting function is “the related tasks and systems that develop and integrate those activities enabling a commander to balance the art of command and the science of control in order to integrate the other warfighting functions.”<sup>6</sup> A function is an ongoing group of actions that belong together because of their purpose; this means the mission command warfighting function is a structured way commanders arrange numerous processes and activities under a common purpose so the force can accomplish missions and training objectives.

*The mission command system.* Finally, a mission command system is “the arrangement of personnel, networks, information systems, processes and procedures, facilities, and equipment that enable commanders to conduct operations.”<sup>7</sup> This means each mission command system is different, because although its components are similar, each commander arranges them to support decision making and facilitate communication for a given mission. Mission command systems are not synonymous with information systems; an information system is only one part of a mission command system.

It is important to note that one of the components of a mission command system is personnel. Within the general doctrinal idea of a mission command system, the emphasis is that commanders systematically organize subordinate functions, starting with the people who perform them, so they can command and control forces effectively.

The next sections offer a practical interpretation of how NCOs function in support of mission command. To understand the role of NCOs in mission command, it is helpful to look at its principles as they apply at the levels of senior leaders, mid-grade leaders, and first-line leaders.

## **Noncommissioned Officers and the Philosophy of Mission Command**

First, NCOs need to understand the practical application of the six principles of mission command. Those principles can help NCOs at all levels determine how to support commanders. Doctrine describes how the principles of mission command assist commanders and staff; however, it specifies very little about how those principles apply to sergeants major. The doctrine says that command sergeants major are among the key personnel dedicated to mission command. According to doctrine, they carry out policies, enforce standards, give advice, and initiate recommendations about matters pertaining to soldiers. In operations, commanders employ command sergeants major, company first sergeants, and platoon sergeants to extend command influence, assess morale, and assist during critical events.<sup>8</sup>

*Cohesive teams and shared understanding.* Sergeants major can be the commanders' confidants. They work to support commanders in developing a climate that fosters mutual trust and team building. Effective team building depends on fostering communication, understanding, and relationships. To that end, the sergeants major strive to ensure there is a shared understanding of the commander's intent, at all levels, and they provide feedback to commanders to assist with unit assessment. In conjunction with this, sergeants major use their training, education, and experience to serve as the link between commanders and soldiers.

*Commander's intent and disciplined initiative.* The commander provides the commander's intent, and sergeants major ensure the purpose of the operation and the desired end state make sense to each soldier.<sup>9</sup> On one hand, the sergeants major make sure each soldier understands how the commander's intent is both feasible and achievable. In addition, they ensure that the right people are in the right place with the right



equipment to achieve the commander's desired results. This is at the heart of mission command – through disciplined initiative, soldiers who understand the purpose and desired end state can find ways to accomplish missions even when events unfold in unexpected ways.

*Mission orders and prudent risk.* Professional NCOs lead realistic, high-quality training that achieves unit cohesion and discipline. Each NCO cultivates in soldiers the habit of disciplined initiative, focused on achieving objectives under mission orders that emphasize to subordinates the results to be attained rather than how to achieve them. This enables commanders to accept prudent risk as they establish objectives.

The principles of mission command apply in parallel at subordinate levels of command – senior NCOs, mid-grade NCOs, and first-line leaders. At their respective levels of organization and authority, they assist their commanders and platoon leaders in promoting understanding among soldiers of the commander's intent, building cohesive teams based on mutual trust, and executing operations in a disciplined manner. The mission command philosophy will fail only if a commander's intent is not understood or if soldiers exercise undisciplined initiative. From this perspective, the critical role of NCOs becomes clear.

### **Noncommissioned Officers and the Mission Command Warfighting Function**

Next, NCOs need to understand their part in supporting the tasks and subordinate systems of the mission command warfighting function. According to mission command doctrine, within the mission command warfighting function the main commander tasks are:

- Drive the operations process
- Develop teams within and outside the organization
- Inform and influence audiences within and out

The commander drives the operations process by understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing operations.<sup>10</sup>

As commanders use the mission command war-fighting function to integrate the other warfighting functions – movement and maneuver, intelligence, fires, sustainment, and protection – it is their sergeants major who provide sage advice on capabilities, outcomes, concerns, and friction points. They provide their commanders with constant assessments and feedback, so they can make well-informed decisions. Similarly, senior, mid-grade, and first-line leaders – through feedback, training, education, and experience – inform their commanders about approaches that have or have not worked in the past. They can discuss the effectiveness of various capabilities needed for any of the warfighting functions.

*Driving the operations process.* NCOs in all specialties and at all levels have a direct role in helping commanders drive the operations process. NCOs at the senior level help commanders organize soldiers with expertise in different specialties to support the appropriate warfighting function. Mid-grade leaders ensure those soldiers are trained, and they share knowledge with their commanders about the availability of or need for expertise to inform commanders' decisions. First-line leaders execute the mission and perform subordinate tasks within the given intent.

In order for commanders to understand and visualize, they must have a reasonably accurate picture of the problem set or mission. Through their leadership and experience, the sergeants major or other NCOs provide key information to assist commanders in their process of understanding and visualizing.

Commanders describe and direct as NCOs execute. During execution, NCOs at each level feed their commanders information about all aspects of the organization or mission, allowing commanders to see their organizations and make accurate assessments and adjustments as necessary. In this manner, NCOs enable mission command.

*Developing teams and informing and influencing audiences.* Sergeants major and other NCOs at all levels can help commanders develop teams and inform and influence audiences. As sergeants major

circulate on the battlefield, they help develop teams and influence others by disseminating the commander's message. Sergeants major and other NCOs communicate with soldiers and ensure the commander's intent is fully understood. Many times, NCOs at the mid-grade and first-line leader level have daily interaction with personnel inside and outside their organizations. By distributing their commander's message and creating a shared understanding of their commander's intent, they are helping the commander develop teams and influence audiences.

In addition to supporting the commander tasks, NCOs at all levels have a large role in what doctrine calls the staff tasks and additional tasks (see ADRP 6-1 for a complete list of tasks). For example, NCOs are subject matter experts in cyber electromagnetic activities, knowledge management, and in installing, operating, and maintaining networks.

## **Noncommissioned Officers and Mission Command Systems**

The final piece of mission command that NCOs need to understand is the mission command system, consisting of personnel, networks, information systems, processes, procedures, facilities, and equipment. The key to each commander's system is personnel – the human factor.

*Personnel.* For a mission command system to be successful, the right personnel with the right training must be in the right jobs. Commanders rely on subject matter experts for information they need to exercise mission command, and NCOs at every level share the responsibility to ensure the personnel in their organizations are properly trained and assigned.

Sergeants major and senior, mid-grade, and first-line leaders continuously assess the training, education, and experience of their soldiers to ensure they are employed to maximum effectiveness within their commanders' mission command systems. Typically, sergeants major assess the backgrounds and skills of individuals entering the unit to determine how they can support the organization effectively. Periodic assessments by senior and mid-grade NCOs provide feedback to commanders on how individuals are performing and if they are meeting the standards of their assignments.

*Networks, information systems, processes, procedures, facilities, and equipment.* Among the remaining components of a mission command system, NCOs develop and execute the processes and procedures. They help maintain the networks, information systems, facilities, and equipment. Since sergeants major, NCOs, or subordinate leaders are at the forefront of the actions performed within the mission command system components, they are likely to be among the first to recognize what does or does not work. They play a key role in relaying that information to commanders so they can make adjustments.

## **Conclusion**

Although mission command is commander-centric and commander driven, on examination it is easy to see that NCOs at every level have a primary role in the success of mission command. The mission command philosophy, with its six principles, and the mission command warfighting function, with its tasks and systems, require significant NCO engagement. In fact, the only way commanders will be able to exercise mission command successfully is by having trained, educated, and experienced NCOs at the forefront of operations.

## Notes

1. This article is a slightly revised version of the original article published in *Military Review*, September-October 2014: 5-11.
2. Doctrine 2015 refers to a major reorganization of doctrinal publications, begun in 2011. The purpose is to reduce their length and number, reduce development time, and enhance collaboration and accessibility through technology.
3. Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2012); Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2012).
4. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 1.
5. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 2.
6. Department of the Army, ADRP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2012), 3-2.
7. Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 11.
8. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, 3-9.
9. Commander's intent is defined as "a clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state that supports mission command, provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander's desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned." Source: Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, Joint Operations, (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 11 August 2011).
10. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, 3-2.



## Chapter 16

### Thunder Run in Baghdad, 2003<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Anthony E. Carlson

Major General Buford “Buff” Blount faced a critical decision. During the previous two weeks, his 3d Infantry Division (ID) (Mechanized) had raced 700 kilometers through southern Iraq, reaching the outskirts of Baghdad in early April 2003. The division had overrun both Baghdad’s airport west of the city (Objective LIONS) and the key intersection of Highways 8 and 1 (Objective SAINTS) directly south of the city, allowing it to create a partial cordon around the capital. Blount and the senior leaders of US Army V Corps, 3d ID’s higher headquarters, now needed to seize the city and collapse Saddam Hussein’s regime, but how?

Blount and V Corps Commander Lieutenant General William S. Wallace had no concrete intelligence about the capability and intent of the Iraqi forces protecting Baghdad. To collect intelligence about the conventional and paramilitary units inside the city, they planned an armored reconnaissance in force. At 1600 on 4 April, Blount gave the mission to Colonel David G. Perkins, commander of 3d ID’s 2d Brigade, for execution the following morning. Staging out of Objective SAINTS, the battalion-sized column of M1A1 Abrams tanks and M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles would attack north on Highway 8 into the middle of western Baghdad and then turn west, linking up with Colonel William Grimsley’s 1st Brigade, 3d ID, at the airport. The bold plan, which Wallace judged a “reasonable risk,” was destined to become the first armored foray into a major city since World War II.<sup>2</sup>

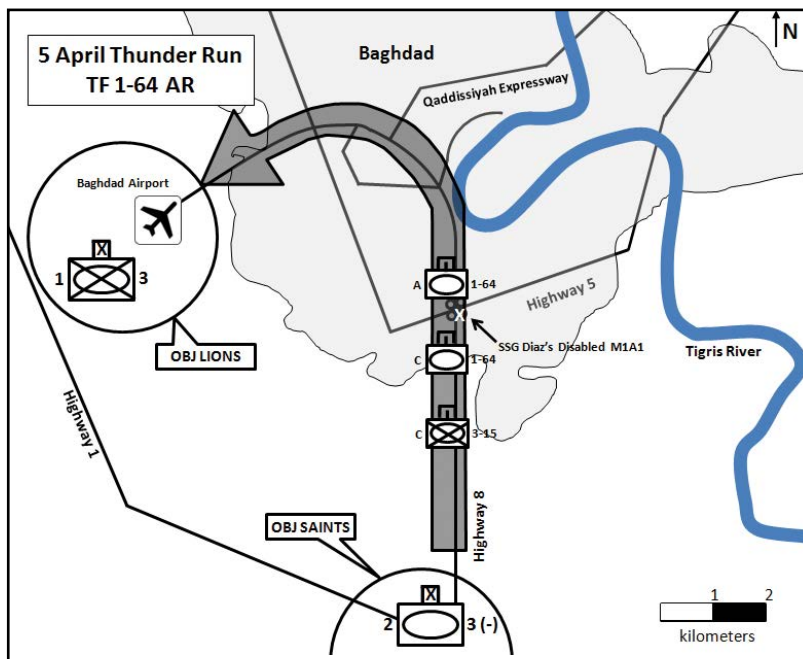


Figure 1. 5 April Thunder Run, TF 1-64 AR. Created by author.

Perkins assigned the so-called “thunder run” mission to Lieutenant Colonel Eric Schwartz’s Task Force (TF) 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment (1-64 AR). Schwartz’s TF 1-64 AR included 731 Soldiers, 30 M1A1 tanks, 14 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles, 14 engineer vehicles, and other mechanized support vehicles. Perkins’ intent was to attack up Highway 8 to “create as much confusion as I can inside the city because I had found that my Soldiers or my units can react to chaos much better than the enemy can.”<sup>3</sup> Although the sudden new mission caught Schwartz off guard, he praised the straightforward commander’s intent and purpose. “The planning was simple,” he explained. “The thunder run mission was the simplest

of all tasks that we were given. There was no maneuver required. It was simply battle orders followed by battle drills.”<sup>4</sup>

At 0600 on 5 April, Schwartz’s armored column rolled north up Highway 8. In the vanguard of the staggered column was Captain Andrew Hilmes’ Alpha Company. Colonel Perkins accompanied the task force in his command M113 armored personnel carrier to observe firsthand the effectiveness and distribution of enemy forces.

Moments after beginning the movement, the task force came under intense and sustained fire. Special Republican Guard (SRG) soldiers, *Fedayeen Saddam* militiamen, Syrian and Palestinian mercenaries, and other paramilitary forces unleashed an unremitting barrage of AK-47 rifle fire, rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), and mortar rounds from hastily-prepared positions adjacent to the highway. As the task force rumbled north, police cars, taxis, ambulances, garbage trucks, and other civilian vehicles massed along the highway, depositing hundreds of additional enemy fighters. The rifle and RPG volleys turned the operation into something akin to running a gauntlet of fire but it did little to slow the armored column.

Near the first overpass on Highway 8, an RPG round exploded in the rear of Staff Sergeant Jason Diaz’s tank, immobilizing it. As Diaz’s crew struggled to put out a growing fire and get the disabled tank rolling again, trailing Abrams and Bradley Fighting Vehicles formed a defensive perimeter. The tankers mowed down dozens of fighters assembling alongside the highway with coaxial machine gun fire and main gun rounds. Since Perkins’ order emphasized momentum, LTC Schwartz made the call after half an hour to abandon Diaz’s tank, recover the crew, retrieve sensitive computer systems, and attack north deeper into the city.



Figure 2. TF 1-64 AR Attacking up Highway 8 on 5 April 2003. Photo Courtesy of the Fort Stewart Museum, US Army.

The armored column passed the Qaddissiyah Expressway ramp towards downtown Baghdad and turned west in the direction of the airport, entering crowded residential neighborhoods. Hundreds of paramilitary fighters and military personnel assaulted Schwartz’s column from all directions, only to fall victim to the Americans’ overwhelming firepower. The enemy resorted to placing makeshift concrete barriers across the highway and even launching suicide vehicle attacks but with no success. After two hours and 20 minutes, the column arrived at the airport. Colonel Perkins concluded that the reconnaissance in force had completely

surprised the regime. “[The Iraqis] thought that they could bloody our nose enough on the outside of the city ... that we just would not push through block by block,” Perkins explained. “They weren’t planning for this very heavy armored thrust busting right through, coming in[to] the city.”<sup>5</sup>

The thunder run demonstrated that US armored forces could penetrate Baghdad while suffering minimal casualties. During the movement, TF 1-64 AR sustained one destroyed Abrams tank, one heavily damaged Bradley, one Soldier killed in action (KIA), and four Soldiers wounded in action (WIA). Schwartz’s task force killed at least 1,000 Iraqi and Syrian fighters, destroyed 30 to 40 Russian-manufactured BMP infantry fighting vehicles and other vehicles, destroyed one T-72 main battle tank, and eliminated countless roadside bunkers. The operation provided excellent indicators of enemy tactics, strength, and fighting positions. For instance, the task force discovered that the enemy preferred to mass fires from overpasses. Perkins observed that the bridges provided the enemy cover and concealment and afforded “avenues of approach in the flank.”<sup>6</sup>

Lieutenant General Wallace and Major General Blount praised the 5 April thunder run. They envisioned it as a prelude to additional armored missions in and out of the city that would disrupt Baghdad’s defenses with the paramount goal of regime collapse. Late on 5 April, Wallace ordered a second such mission for 7 April. Blount again assigned the task to 2d Brigade.

After returning to SAINTS with TF 1-64 AR and receiving Blount’s orders, Perkins proposed a bolder course of action to his division commander. He wanted to take two armor task forces into Baghdad and *turn east* at the same intersection where TF 1-64 AR had looped west towards the airport. The task forces would travel several additional kilometers and occupy the regime’s downtown government complex on the banks of the Tigris River, the location of Saddam Hussein’s ornate palaces, his ruling party’s headquarters, parade grounds, and war monuments. With the rest of V Corps and the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force bearing down on Baghdad from southwest and southeast respectively, Perkins identified the downtown palaces as the regime’s “center of gravity.” He hoped to avoid an endless cycle of armored forays that scored tactical victories but did not hasten strategic success.

Perkins also feared that the US Army was losing the information war. The Iraqi information minister, Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf, had taken to the airwaves and falsely announced that Iraqis had slaughtered US Soldiers outside of Baghdad. To make matters worse, the British Broadcasting Company was broadcasting al-Sahhaf’s propaganda to the world. Perkins wanted to send an unmistakable message to Iraqis that the regime’s days were numbered. “I didn’t want [the false stories] to happen again,” he emphasized. “[Al-Sahhaf’s disinformation was] falsely emboldening the Iraqis to continue to fight and defend [the city] ... stretching this war out.”<sup>7</sup> Perkins concluded that the enemy’s relatively unsophisticated and uncoordinated resistance during the first thunder run showed that such a bold operation was possible.

On 6 April, Blount brought Perkins’ recommendation before Lieutenant General Wallace. The corps commander dismissed it. Even though Wallace sought to render the regime “irrelevant,” the plan at Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) level at this point intended to topple the regime through synchronized attrition rather than a dramatic armored thrust. The CFLCC envisioned creating a cordon of forward operating bases (FOBs) around Baghdad from which US forces could launch pinpoint raids and seize critical objectives so that they did not have to clear the city block by block. From a tactical perspective, Wallace also feared that Perkins might overextend his line of communication (LOC) between Objective SAINTS and the palace grounds, isolating the task forces in a hostile city of five million people without the ability to resupply his units or evacuate casualties. He directed Blount to take a “less aggressive tactic” that involved attacking into the city to the point of the airport interchange but then returning to SAINTS.<sup>8</sup>

The events that unfolded over the next 24 hours serve as a clear illustration of mission command principles in action. As Perkins prepared to execute V Corps’ limited objective for the second thunder run, he conceptualized an additional plan to allow 2d Brigade and its assigned units to go downtown and “stay the night” if conditions warranted. Privately, Perkins set four preconditions to meet before he would offer his

option to go downtown and stay during the mission. The preconditions were based on “lessons learned” during the first thunder run:

1. The 2d Brigade could successfully fight its way into downtown without becoming fixed.
2. Seizing defensible and symbolic terrain at the downtown palace complex.
3. Opening and maintaining a ground LOC using Highway 8 and the Qaddissiyah Expressway between the Tigris River and Objective SAINTS.
4. Logistical conditions supported remaining overnight.

On the afternoon of 6 April, Perkins briefed his intent. Speaking in a dusty tent without notes, slides, or handouts, Perkins explained to his subordinate commanders that the entire brigade would conduct a second thunder run at dawn the next morning. He instructed them to prepare to spend the night downtown. “We have set the conditions to create the collapse of the Iraqi regime. Now we’re transitioning from a tactical battle [*sic*] to a psychological and informational battle,” he said. Maintaining momentum during the movement was paramount. “Attack as fast as you can, and push right through to the center of the city,” Perkins added. “If a vehicle becomes disabled due to enemy fire, you immediately take the crew off, put them on another vehicle, and you just leave it.”<sup>9</sup>

The scheme of maneuver had Lieutenant Colonel Schwartz’s TF 1-64 AR assuming the vanguard. If conditions warranted turning northeast towards downtown, TF 1-64 AR would seize downtown Objective DIANE, which included the Tomb of the Unknowns, a park, and a zoo. Lieutenant Colonel Philip Draper deCamp’s TF 4th Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment (TF 4-64 AR), would follow TF 1-64 AR and seize two of Saddam Hussein’s palaces on the Tigris River (Objectives WOODY EAST and WOODY WEST). The third battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Twitty’s TF 3d Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment (TF 3-15 IN), would keep the LOC open between Objective SAINTS and downtown. To do so, TF 3-15 IN had to control three vital overpass intersections on Highway 8, designated as CURLY, LARRY, and MOE. MOE was the key interchange where Perkins’ Soldiers either had to move east in the direction of downtown or make a U-turn, returning to SAINTS. For Perkins, controlling the three overpass intersections was decisive to securing MG Blount’s approval of his option to go downtown.

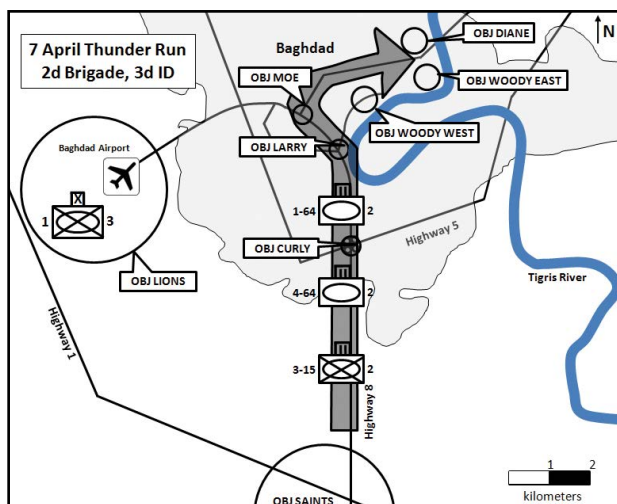


Figure 3. 7 April Thunder Run, 2d Brigade. Created by author.

The second thunder run got off to a rocky start. In the wake of the 5 April attack up Highway 8, the Iraqis had laid a minefield on the highway north of SAINTS, extending for 500 meters. At 0538 on 7 April, Captain David Hibner’s company of 2d Brigade engineers hastily cleared 444 mines. By 0600, TF 1-64 AR, TF 4-64 AR, and TF 3-15 IN departed in that order in a long column. Only eleven minutes into the



movement, enemy small arms fire, RPGs, and mortar rounds erupted from both sides of the highway. In accordance with Colonel Perkins' intent, the two leading task forces continued to advance and hand over targets to trailing units, which also recovered the crews of disabled armored vehicles.

Perkins faced his first critical decision an hour into the operation. As the armored column clanked towards MOE, he radioed Brigadier General Lloyd J. Austin III, Assistant Division Commander (Maneuver), explaining that the level of resistance faced by 2d Brigade was less intense than during the previous thunder run. He stated his preconditions for going downtown, insisting that he could meet all of them. Without giving a definitive answer, Austin stated that he would inform Blount. He told Perkins to continue the advance and see how the fight developed. Shortly after 0700, the armored column turned east off Highway 8 and, within an hour, seized DIANE, WOODY EAST, and WOODY WEST. The brigade commander calculated that he had enough fuel to delay a final decision about formally requesting an overnight stay until 1000. In his mind, the shock value of keeping US armor task forces downtown outweighed the significant risks associated with being isolated in a hostile urban environment.



Figure 4. Attacking towards Downtown Baghdad on 7 April 2003. Photo Courtesy of Ft. Stewart Museum, US Army.

The movement off Highway 8 caused a stir at V Corps headquarters. When Lieutenant General Wallace went to bed on 6 April, he thought that 2d Brigade would advance to MOE and then make a U-turn, heading back to SAINTS. As the armored task forces advanced towards the downtown objectives, Wallace observed the operation on the screen of his Blue Force Tracker. Stunned, the corps commander asked Blount about the unexpected deviation from his intent during their regular morning brief. Blount explained Perkins' estimation that the diminished resistance justified turning downtown and positioning tanks at Hussein's palace complex in a dramatic show of the regime's irrelevance. Tension filled the room as Wallace contemplated the situation. Finally, Wallace broke the long silence by signaling his eager approval. According to Colonel Russell Thaden, the V Corps Deputy G2 (intelligence officer) who was present at the time of the conversation, Wallace replied, "Go ahead, I trust your judgment. If you think you can get to the palace and hold it, [its] your call and I'll clear it [with CLFCC.]"<sup>10</sup> Refusing to focus on the divergence from his original guidance, Wallace instead recognized that one of his subordinate commanders had created an opportunity for success through disciplined initiative and prudent risk taking. He believed that the overall result of the

mission was more important than the methods used to achieve it. Both the corps and division commanders therefore deferred to the judgment of the commander on the ground.

Meanwhile, the 2d Brigade faced a rapidly deteriorating situation. As TF 3-15 IN slugged it out at CURLY, LARRY, and MOE with bands of determined enemy fighters, a rocket attack disrupted the brigade tactical operations center (TOC) at Objective SAINTS, killing three Soldiers and temporarily cutting off communications. In the midst of the mayhem, Lieutenant Colonel Eric Wesley, the 2d Brigade executive officer (XO), calmly orchestrated efforts to triage wounded Soldiers and evacuate disabled vehicles. Within 45 minutes, Wesley had reestablished communication and set up a makeshift TOC, minimizing the disruption of command and control. Perkins praised Wesley and all Soldiers at the TOC for remaining focused on the mission in the midst of disarray. He later expounded on the Soldiers' shared understanding of his intent, "Everyone understood how important it was to stay in the city and not have to fight the fight again."<sup>11</sup>

Events continued to spiral out of control on Highway 8. As Perkins reached his self-imposed 1000 deadline for seeking permission to spend the night, TF 3-15 IN was still fighting to maintain control of the three interchanges at CURLY, LARRY, AND MOE. Even worse, Iraqi fighters ambushed the first convoy of heavy expanded mobility tactical trucks (HEMTTs) hauling much-needed supplies and fuel up Highway 8. Five HEMTTs were destroyed, two Soldiers killed, and Highway 8 remained disputed. Fierce fighting around Objective MOE also left a mechanized infantry company critically short of ammunition.



Figure 5. MG Blount, LTG Wallace, and COL Perkins in Baghdad, April 2003.  
Photo Courtesy of Ft. Stewart Museum, US Army.

Despite the dire circumstances, Colonel Perkins refused to rush his decision. "If you had a decision matrix," he stated, "it probably d[id] not pay to spend the night."<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, he delayed because he did not want to surrender symbolic ground or face the possibility of ordering additional armored attacks in the coming days. Withdrawing from the city would also embolden the regime and provide additional propaganda for the information minister. Based on extensive pre-war training in Kuwait, Perkins trusted Lieutenant Colonel Twitty's task force to win the battles at the overpass intersections if given sufficient time, bought by delaying a decision past 1000. To mitigate resupply problems, he instituted an "energy conservation plan," ordering TF 1-64 AR and TF 4-64 AR tank commanders to turn off their engines. He then positioned the task forces' Bradleys at key downtown bridges and intersections to strengthen the defensive posture.

Perkins believed that such measures would buy him several additional hours before supply concerns might force him to withdraw.

Major General Blount again trusted the judgment of his commander on the ground. At 1016, he reinforced TF 3-15 IN by moving the 1st Brigade's TF 2d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment (TF 2-7 IN), to occupy and defend Objective CURLY, allowing TF 3-15 IN to focus on clearing LARRY and MOE. By late afternoon, the infantry task forces had defeated the Iraqi fighters along Highway 8 and cleared the LOC for the HEMTTs to move north to supply Perkins' brigade.

Just hours before sundown, the fuel and ammunition resupply reached downtown after a harrowing movement up Highway 8. Colonel Perkins' deliberate decision-making and confidence in his subordinate commanders validated Lieutenant General Wallace's and Major General Blount's trust in him. By early evening, Wallace approved the decision to spend the night.

There is always a tension between executing mission orders and exercising disciplined initiative but Wallace clearly understood the benefits of empowering subordinate commanders to make decisions in a fluid, complex, and highly unpredictable tactical environment. "Colonel Perkins, to his credit ... was taking advantage of the situation that was presented to him on the battlefield," Wallace explained, "which is what we teach our young leaders to do."<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, the second thunder run produced tactical, strategic, and information victories as television networks soon broadcasted images of US tanks occupying Saddam Hussein's former seat of power. In retrospect, Perkins attributed the 2d Brigade's success to the flexibility displayed by Wallace and Blount and their willingness to empower him with freedom of action:

These thunder runs were successful because the corps and division-level commanders established clear intent in their orders and trusted their subordinates' judgment and abilities to exercise disciplined initiative in response to a fluid, complex problem, underwriting the risks that they took.<sup>14</sup>

The Iraqi information minister could no longer deny that US Soldiers occupied Saddam Hussein's seat of administrative power. The regime teetered on the brink of an inevitable collapse. Within weeks, the Baathist government no longer ruled Iraq.

## Notes

1. This article is a slightly revised version of the original published in Donald P. Wright (ed.) *16 Cases of Mission Command* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2013).
2. PBS Frontline, Interview with Lt. Gen. William Wallace, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/invasion/interviews/wallace.html> (accessed 16 February 2016).
3. PBS Frontline, Interview Col. David Perkins, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/invasion/interviews/perkins.html> (accessed on 16 February 2016).
4. Interview with COL Eric Schwartz by Operational Leadership Experience, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 21 April 2007, 4. <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4013coll13/id/822/rec/1> (accessed on 16 February 2016).
5. PBS Frontline, Interview with Col. David Perkins.
6. Interview with Colonel David Perkins by Major Daniel Chiles, 102d Military History Detachment, 25 May 2003, 55.
7. Interview with Colonel David Perkins by Major Daniel Chiles, 73.
8. PBS Frontline, Interview with Lt. Gen. William Wallace.
9. PBS Frontline, Interview with Col. David Perkins.
10. Interview with COL (Ret.) Russell Thaden by the Operational Leadership Experience, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 28 June 2011, 16. <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4013coll13/id/2356/rec/4> (accessed 16 February 2016).
11. Interview with Colonel David Perkins by Major Daniel Chiles, 102d Military History Detachment, 25 May 2003, Part III.
12. Interview with Colonel David Perkins by Major Daniel Chiles, 102d Military History Detachment, 25 May 2003, Part III.
13. PBS Frontline, Interview with Lt. Gen. William Wallace.
14. LTG David Perkins, "Mission Command: Reflections from the Combined Arms Center" *Army* (June 2012), 32.

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