



Mission Command: Evolution of a Warfighting Function Applied to Recruiting Operations

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Mission command is the latest and greatest buzz word carelessly voiced by Officers and Noncommissioned Officers alike. It is a term overused by most, understood by few, and executed by even fewer. Mission command is a function of authority that allows for individual and organizational initiative to accomplish a specified mission. It avoids the use of rigid mission orders and detailed mission accomplishment plans, and empowers leaders to accomplish a mission as they deem necessary in accordance with the commander's intent. Mission command is not only executed by commanders, but by every echelon, leader and subordinate in any element. Essentially, mission command discourages micro-management, encourages innovation, and enhances leader development. To effectively employ mission command in the United States Army Recruiting Command (USAREC), we must evolve our understanding of the principles of mission command as they apply to recruiting operations.

Compared to a conventional Army division, USAREC has the most simply definable enduring mission. Each year USAREC must enlist a predetermined number of America's best volunteers to sustain the overall end strength of the Army and Army Reserve. Unlike conventional Army divisions, USAREC is not designed to execute unified land operations, special operations, or any other mission for that matter. Therefore it is only capable of one mission. That should not discount the importance of the organization or the recruiting mission.

Evolve our understanding of commander's intent:

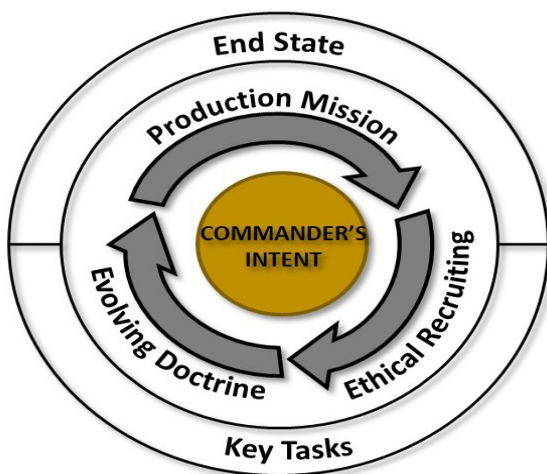
Commander's intent is defined by Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0 as "a clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state." More commonly you will see this in the operations process categorized as the purpose, key tasks, and end state. In the doctrinal sense, in USAREC, the commander's intent is somewhat rigid because the enduring mission sees little to no change in purpose of, key tasks are generally the same year to year, and the mission is always a predetermined number of volunteers that must enlist. To avoid discounting the concept of mission command within USAREC, we must evolve our doctrinal understanding of the mission command concept as it applies as a recruiting function. To do this, we must first be able to have a better understanding of the commander's intent, and put it in terms that are mutually understood across the command.

The bedrock of mission command is the commander's intent. The commander's intent can be described in non-doctrinal terms as the left and right limits of an operation with a desired goal, or end-state, to be met. In USAREC it can be assumed in any fiscal year that the commander's intent is to ethically enlist a predetermined number of volunteers in order to meet the end-strength of the Army and Army Reserve. On the surface that statement seems simple, flexible, and achievable. When the subsequent mission planning concludes is where the commander's intent becomes blurred.

Military operations are consistently plagued by the human element. According to ADRP 6-0, military operations are "contests of will characterized by continuous and mutual adaptation by all participants." Those contests of will in the sphere of recruiting operations occur not between combatant commanders on the battlefield, but between applicants for enlistment and those charged with recruiting and processing them. These contests of will may also exist amongst recruiting personnel and the supporting enablers, doctrine, and regulatory guidance that govern the enlistment process. A prime example of conflict and adaptation within USAREC is the USAREC Message. These regularly published modifications to Army Regulation 601-210 serve as clarification or amendment to processing or recruiting guidance. They may also serve as a frustrating restriction to Recruiters operating

in an ever complicated environment.

In execution of mission command in any environment, all personnel must be prepared to accept responsibility, assume prudent risk, and do what is deemed necessary to accomplish the mission within the scope of the commander's intent. In the recruiting operating environment, this includes Recruiters, Center Leaders, Command Groups, and staff sections at all echelons, as well as applicants and their influencers for enlistment. As stated before, due to the human element, this is a major friction point. As we evolve our concept of mission command as it applies to recruiting operations, it is important to look at our regulatory guidance as part of the commander's intent. Every Operations Flash, USAREC Message, manual, or regulation that is pertinent to recruiting operations is in fact a supplement to the commander's intent. They evolve as the operational environment evolves, and the way we operate in turn must evolve as well. This developed understanding will not relieve the friction of the human element inherent in any military operation, but it will make the concept of mission command more absorbable.



Evolved understanding of commander's intent as it applies to recruiting operations: Commander's intent is the bedrock of mission command. In USAREC our end state is the enlistment production mission, with key tasks of ethical recruiting practices and our evolving doctrine (USAREC Messages, Operations Flashes, etc.).

Build cohesive teams through mutual trust:

The first and most important pillar of mission command is building cohesive teams through mutual trust. Mutual trust in the recruiting sphere includes not only trust between commanders and subordinates, but the civilian population we are charged with recruiting as well. We as an organization gain and lose the support of the population at unpredictable intervals. We will never know how or when this will occur but we can guarantee that these incidents will occur. The trust of the civilian population depends largely on the actions of the entire Army, our political leaders, and the media attention given to these actions. There is no gesture or elaborate action that can immediately mend the damage caused by these unfortunate events. These damaging events, as much as we may try, cannot be forecasted or completely prevented. Furthermore, trust is gained through everyday action, and consequently it takes a significant amount of time to gain trust. More importantly it takes one action to likely lose all trust within a community and will take several years, if at all, to regain that trust. That being said, to best approach mutual trust as it applies to recruiting operations we must focus effort to the lowest echelon of the organization: the recruiting center.

Trust is often confused with blind trust. Often times, when blind trust occurs the perpetrator forgets the where their trust lies. Trust is to the country, constitution and organization. When blind trust corrupts a situation, the trust is usually applied to an individual or individuals. Several accounts of blind trust have been well documented, such as Nazi leaders during the Nuremberg Tribunals after World War II or the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam. In each case, the perpetrator's defense was that their superiors ordered them to execute the orders therefore they must take action. This same blind trust occurs each Recruiting Calendar Month in any unit in this command. We continue to place blind trust in our leaders and subordinates to conduct ethical operations, yet we are consistently disappointed by the illicit activities perpetrated by members of this organization. While the nefarious activities of the few may not be to the magnitude of the My Lai Massacre, the digital media age we live in magnifies everything and the length of time to repair this incidents can be similar. According to ADP 6-0, "Commanders earn trust by upholding the Army values and exercising leadership, consistent with the Army's Leadership principles."



Not unlike the organization itself, the members of this organization are also geographically, economically, and professionally diverse. Soldiers in USAREC have a broad range of Military Occupational Specialties, deployment experience, and military training. Couple that with the fact that a majority of the Soldiers in this organization are not career Recruiters and have been selected by the Department of the Army for recruiting duty creates a potential chasm of mistrust and internal discontent. Mutual trust can be both advantageous and potentially destructive. On the positive side, a cohesive element that shares mutual trust can be highly productive. The members of that unit can embody the Army values, and actively deter members of that unit from impropriety and negligence in the execution of their duties. On the negative side, that same unit while being highly productive in a recruiting sense, could propagate impropriety. Examples include running a diploma mill, test ringers, concealing medical information, and coercing enlistment applicants. While the act of enlistment production inherent in these examples supports the commander's intent in achieving the enlistment production mission, recruiting without integrity does not meet the evolved understanding of the commander's intent.¹

USAREC is not a zero defect environment, and should not be perceived as such. The recruiting practices deemed to be improper often grow from simple errors that go unchecked. Trust at the lowest echelon must be nurtured daily through quality control and engaged leadership. Subordinates trust leaders who share doctrinal experience, are technically and tactically relevant, and are actively involved in recruiting operations.

Create a shared understanding at the Recruiting Center level:

The burden of developing a shared understanding of commander's intent through the entire force lies with subordinate commanders, staffs, and those in action to accomplish the mission. In the recruiting sphere, a subordinate commander can be at any echelon brigade or below, even down to the recruiting center leader. Through a shared understanding of the mission and the commander's intent, subordinate commanders create a unity of effort throughout their organization. Through unity of effort, teams and organizations can accomplish more and adapt to the most complex environments because everyone is striving for the same objective, regardless of the means or method of operation.

In warfighting, a universal tool for developing and maintaining a shared understanding is the Common Operating Picture (COP). Examples of a COP in warfighting are the Force Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2) or "Blue Force Tracker," the Command Post of the Future (CPOF), or even something as simple as a sand table. A COP in any form is a live action display of relevant information that is viewed unambiguously by all members of an organization. This tool makes it easy to track enemy activity, friendly forces, and provide real time guidance to an entire command. The most important requirements of the utilization of this concept are access and comprehension. Each decision maker, and at most times each individual charged with execution of a mission must have direct access to the COP and a thorough comprehension of the mission. Without reliable access to the COP or thorough comprehension, situational awareness and mission command are degraded.

Our COP in USAREC, unfortunately, is the entirety of the iKrome system and numerous USAREC Google pages. It is where we track our friendly forces, Recruiters, using the infamous electronic planning guide. It contains a seemingly endless supply of reports in Leader Zone, Report Management Zone, and Business Intelligence Zone showing work ethic. Through GAMAT you can graphically locate each of your Future Soldiers, and on Google you can geographically locate all the Army Reserve Troop Program Units in the country through the Strength Atlas. You can also monitor the evolving commander's intent by viewing current Operations Flashes, USAREC Messages, and USAREC doctrine through a Google site. This may serve as a COP, but it is insufficient to effectively establish a shared understanding. Combine this assortment of resources with the fact that there are often command-wide technical issues accessing iKrome and you have a crippling situation. That being said, until a universal solution is developed, we must hone our craft with the most rudimentary tool to create a shared understanding; the In-Process Review (IPR). In the IPR you can effectively form a daily COP by assigning tasks, tracking friendly forces, identifying issues with applicant processing and placing deliberate effort to resolve it.

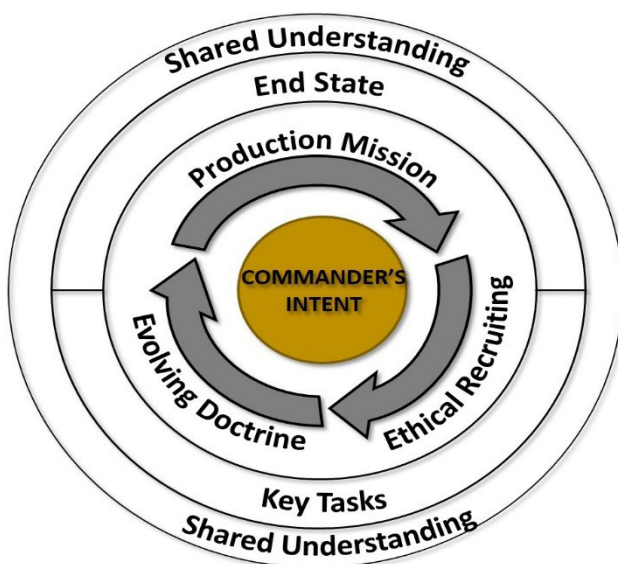


Create a shared understanding at the Company level:

On the surface, the principles of recruiting are menial: talk to people and put them in the Army. This surface-level understanding leads to several issues that contribute to the lack of a shared understanding. Once you truly look at the intricacies of recruiting you will have an enhanced perception. As discussed before, the majority of soldiers in USAREC were volunteered for a recruiting assignment, this includes Commissioned Officers. As a whole, the Commissioned Officers have never conducted recruiting operations, therefore they rely on their leadership experience and their senior enlisted advisors to be successful. Both leadership and the guidance of senior enlisted advisors are strong pillars for success for any Commissioned Officer. However, a thorough individual understanding of the complex environment would contribute to a better shared understanding throughout the command. For several years, USAREC was a Noncommissioned Officer led environment and the Commissioned Officers were simply there to have command authority. Now, recruiting companies are led by Commissioned Officers and Noncommissioned Officers have resumed their traditional advisory roles.

This is a particularly concerning problem where a shared understanding becomes ambiguous. The commonly perceived shared understanding of the recruiting mission among leaders is “to put people in the Army as fast as possible.” That statement, while somewhat true is only brushing the surface. This critical flaw potentially stems from the culture shift in the organization that occurred during the Noncommissioned Officer to Commissioned Officer lead transition. While senior enlisted advisors play a crucial role in advising their commander, their advice is falling to a decision maker that has limited practical experience in the field of recruiting—the commander. The tenure of command in USAREC is generally two years, which is just enough time to figure out what right really looks like before they are reassigned. Senior enlisted advisors have filled this experience gap sufficiently, but to truly achieve a common perception and establish a unity of effort across their command, a commander must be technically and tactically relevant. Without sound technical and tactical proficiency at the command level, shared understanding of the mission and the commander’s intent is vulnerable.

Considering the uniqueness of our environment, geographical dispersion of the command, and our ever evolving commander’s intent, institutional development is not the answer to this problem. It is likely addressed through extensive self-development and operational development. That being said, USAREC should continually target high caliber junior company grade officers for assignment in their first command, and establish recruiting as a desirable broadening assignment. Applying the principles of social engineering to solve the problem, a high quality junior officer assuming their first command will be more adept at self-development than another who is taking the assignment as a second or even third command.²



Shared understanding at all levels: If commander’s intent is the bedrock of mission command, then shared understanding is the glue that holds mission command together.



Exercise disciplined initiative at all levels:

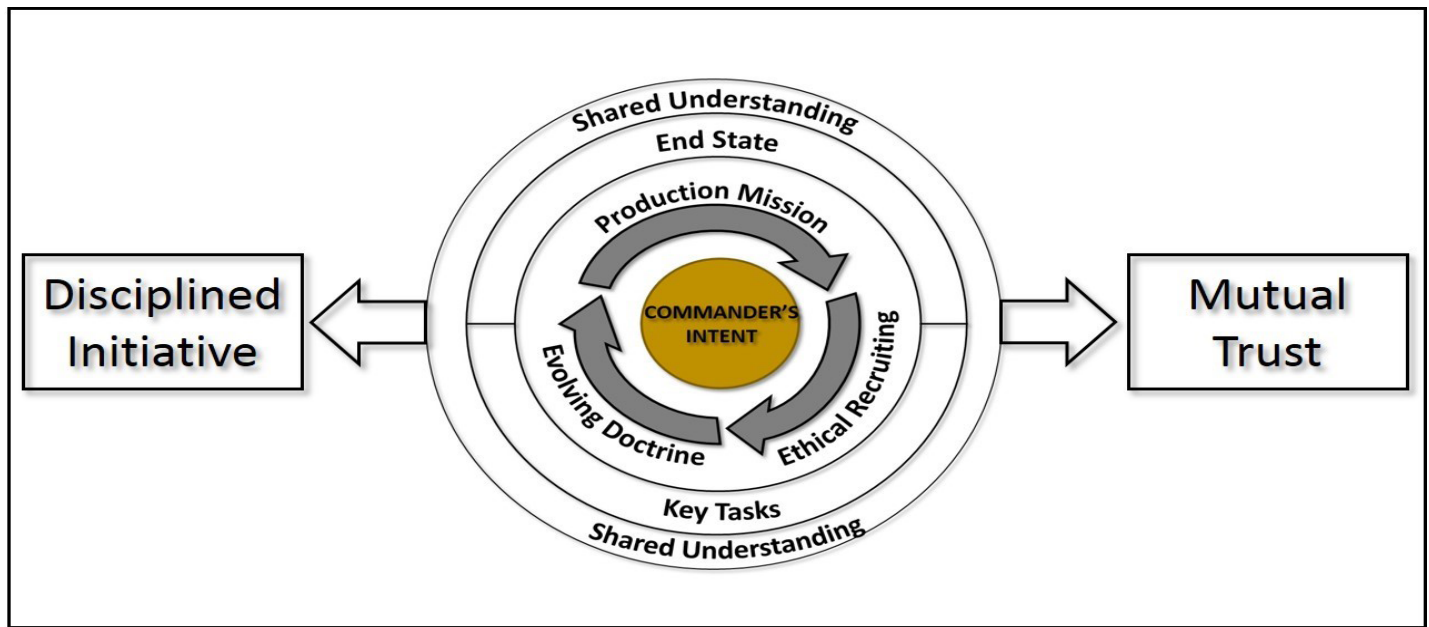
Disciplined initiative is also governed by the commander's intent. The commander's intent has essentially provided rules of engagement, or things you absolutely must do, and things you absolutely must not do during mission execution. This leaves an unfathomable amount of options at the action level to meet the desired end-state. The commander through his intent has not told you exactly what you will or should do to accomplish the mission, but merely laid the ground rules. In USAREC, this is especially advantageous due to the varying demographic of the civilian populace, and the geographic vastness of the command. One cookie cutter rule of engagement is not applicable or feasible to execute across the entire theater. This enhances disciplined initiative at all levels therefore forcing the principles of mission command.

In warfighting, subordinate leaders are the eyes and ears of the commander on the ground. They exercise disciplined initiative in situations where unforeseen opportunity or threats present themselves. In recruiting operations, we tend to hinder disciplined initiative. Humans as a whole consistently rely on what they are comfortable doing. Furthermore, if we are brave enough to try a new technique or prospecting method it is generally short-lived because there are not instant results and instant results are demanded in this environment.

For many years, telephone prospecting was the key approach to recruiting America's best volunteers. Now those Recruiters that relied heavily on telephone prospecting are Command Sergeants Major, First Sergeants and Center Leaders. These leaders are very knowledgeable and resilient however, some lack the stomach for innovation and will quickly divert back to proven methods at the first sign of vulnerability. This ties directly to their role as an advisor to their commander. Telephone prospecting still has a role in recruiting but other methods are extremely viable; especially considering how the quality market communicates today. This is not a new idea. We need to quit talking about adapting as the market does and actually adapt. A vast majority of successful businesses have adapted to the culture change and focus their prospecting efforts on other techniques; few successful businesses place primary effort on telephone prospecting.

While there are many defined methods of prospecting, and opportunities to leverage other methods of prospecting, there is no one size fits all for this organization. It is imperative that small unit leaders across the command assume prudent risk and allow their subordinates to display disciplined initiative. We have a unique opportunity in this organization: we know our annual mission and generally have enough time to conduct a thorough mission analysis before executing recruiting operations. During the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP), we do not have to plan with many unknown variables. It is vital to capitalize on this advantage to avoid wasting recruiting and processing time, because in this environment the two most valuable assets to a commander are their Recruiters and their time. A conventional Army unit would never begin execution of any operation without first conducting mission analysis and developing a plan. Soldiers by nature want to be successful, even if they show discontent with their current duty assignment. Subordinates should be brought into the fold during mission analysis in order to achieve bottom-up refinement. This will inherently enhance a shared understanding and encourage disciplined initiative. Tasking without mutual buy-in rarely works in any organization.

To effectively execute mission command in USAREC, we must evolve our understanding of the principles of mission command as they apply to recruiting operations and tailor it to fit our organization. Doctrine is always subject to interpretation. Every principle of mission command is subject to individual interpretation. The mission of this organization, however, is not subject to interpretation; there is a pre-determined number of Americans that we must enlist each year into the Army and Army Reserve. Mission command is a function that is designed to balance the art of command and the science of control to help us achieve the objective. When executed as designed with our evolved understanding, mission command can be a very powerful and effective tool.



Evolved understanding of mission command: shared understanding, coupled with the auspices of our evolved commander's intent, fosters both disciplined initiative and mutual trust through cohesive teams.

Sergeant First Class Alex Joy is currently assigned to the Syracuse Army Recruiting Company as an Army Recruiter. During his career he has served with the 1st Battalion (HIMARS), 94th Field Artillery Regiment as a Fires Platoon Sergeant, HIMARS Launcher Section Chief, and Ammunition Section Chief. He has also deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom as the Iraqi Security Forces Cell NCOIC for Multi-National Division Baghdad, in support of Operation New Dawn as a Motorized Infantry Squad Leader, and in support of Joint Task Force-East.

Captain Joseph Harmon is currently the Company Commander of the Syracuse Army Recruiting Company. During his career he has served with the 89th Military Police Brigade, 97th Military Police Battalion, 287th Military Police Company as a Platoon Leader, Company Executive Officer and Battalion S4. He deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom to Kandahar City as the Company Executive Officer for the 287th Military Police Company.

NOTES

1. James Joyner, "Army Recruiters Say They Feel Pressure to Bend Rules," *Outside the Beltway*, May 3, 2005, accessed 01 April 2016, http://www.outsidethebeltway.com/the_new_york_times_national_army_recruiters_say_they_feel_pressure_to_bend_rules/. Joyner highlights the pressures of recruiting duty, and explains why some Recruiters intentionally coerce enlistment applicants, and conceal medial or moral disqualifiers.

2. Christopher Hadnagy defines social engineering as "the science of skillfully maneuvering human beings to take action in some aspect of their lives." He explains the use of the psychological principles used in social engineering; building instant rapport, finding ways to meet people's needs, being well rounded in your general knowledge, and developing your curious side. Christopher Hadnagy, *Social Engineering: The Art of Human Hacking* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Wiley Publishing, 2011).