

Reinvigorating the Army's Approach to Command and Control

Training for Mission Command (Part 3)

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I want all of you, no matter where you land in France tonight, to march on the town of Saint Mère-Église, where together, we're going to liberate the people and fly this flag from the tallest building in town!

—Lt. Col. Edward Krause, commander, 3rd Battalion, 505th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 5 June 1944

Building lethal units and instilling disciplined initiative in every soldier are essential to Army readiness and to leading a winning Army. As we recognize the seventy-fifth anniversary of D-Day this year, the airborne operations behind German lines on 6 June 1944 provide one great example of the need for disciplined initiative. Lt. Col. Edward “Cannonball” Krause, 3rd Battalion, 505th Airborne Infantry Regiment commander, knew that each company had an assigned task that needed to be accomplished, but he also knew the jump into France would be chaotic and any plan, no matter how carefully written or rehearsed, would be the first casualty of enemy contact. So when giving his intent to his paratroopers before their jump, Krause simply told them that if they missed their drop zone or their planned linkup, they were to find their own way to meet him in Saint Mère-Église—their primary objective.¹ Krause’s intent was clear, simple, and memorable to every soldier in the battalion. It not only allowed for subordinate decision-making and initiative, but it also demanded it. Of all the tasks his battalion was assigned, Krause identified the single decisive point for his troopers and the one thing they must do to win.

Developing leaders, soldiers, and units capable of operating this way in combat requires living and training for mission command every day. The object of training for mission command is to instill and empower disciplined initiative in every member of the team.

Previous page: U.S. soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, dismount a Bradley Fighting Vehicle and advance on a target as Hungarian soldiers in BTR-80 armored personnel carriers and dismounted Hungarian soldiers lay suppressive fire 13 November 2014 during a NATO demonstration at the closing ceremony of Iron Sword 2014 in Pabrade, Lithuania. The establishment of clear standards and constant training repetitions are essential for achieving a mission command culture within the U.S. Army and its coalition partners. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Keith Anderson, U.S. Army)

Mission command grew from the view there is no certainty once opposing forces join in violent armed combat. Therefore, the Army’s approach to command and control uses commander’s intent to empower and encourage subordinate decision-making and initiative appropriate to the situation. It is the only approach to command and control that provides sufficiently flexible and rapid decision-making to seize, retain, and exploit operational initiative when fighting a near-peer adversary.

As with any warrior task or battle drill, soldiers and units must train and practice months, and even years, in advance of the outbreak of conflict to be ready to fight using mission command. By living mission orders and commander’s intent every day, leaders seize every opportunity to empower subordinate decision-making and encourage initiative and decentralized execution. Under mission command, subordinate leaders’ initiative at every level is not just permitted, it is required. To achieve and maintain a tempo of operations the enemy force cannot match, well-trained soldiers must act decisively in the absence of orders and without continuous leader interaction when the plan no longer applies because of unfolding events, when an unforeseen opportunity presents itself, or when a new threat appears that demands rapid adaptation.

Training for Mission Command

Training for mission command starts with commanders establishing clear and measurable standards. Standards are the basic building blocks for developing soldier competence in key wartime tasks that enable a culture of mission command and disciplined initiative. Soldiers who become competent in their wartime tasks during training can be trusted to do their jobs in combat. However, just because soldiers execute a task once during training, either individually or as a team, does not mean they are competent in that task. Leaders must continuously assess, plan, and ruthlessly impose progressively more demanding training repetitions to achieve the high degree of competence mission command requires. Absent leader guidance and presence, standards and soldiers’ competence provide the basis for trust, discipline, and decision-making in garrison, in training for combat, and during worldwide operations.

Developing subordinates’ decision-making proficiency requires frequent and repetitive experiences in a variety of garrison and tactical situations. The best commanders provide these experiences, and they do



not fly off the handle when subordinates make mistakes. On the contrary, leaders understand that learning from mistakes in garrison and during training is an effective way to build proficiency. Through multiple repetitions, leaders learn what works and what does not work under varying conditions. Leaders coach and teach during each repetition to promote learning and to build mutual trust among other leaders and their subordinates. The combination of positive and negative experiences allows subordinate leaders to develop judgment and gain the confidence necessary to act decisively and accept risk when they are on their own. The growth of mutual trust between the leader and the led allows commanders to reduce their level of control—a key objective of the mission-command approach.

Tactical decision games are an effective way to build leader competence, decision-making proficiency, and mutual trust up and down the chain of command. For example, a battalion commander might assemble all the platoon leaders around a large terrain board or video display depicting various tactical vignettes. Company commanders, first sergeants, and platoon sergeants attend as well. The battalion commander

Maj. Lazaro Oliva Jr. (center) shows the potential effects of a tactical decision to other 1st Cavalry Division planners 8 November 2018 while conducting the Tactical Wargaming Analysis Model at Fort Hood, Texas. Such wargames are an effective way to cultivate decision-making skills and trust within units. (Photo by Maj. Joseph Payton, U.S. Army)

then deliberately forces the platoon leaders outside of their comfort zone by training them one level up from their current leadership positions. The methodology is a leader-to-leader dialogue centered on tactical scenarios that are intentionally ambiguous. In this case, the battalion commander's training objective is to develop tactical competence and decision-making proficiency in the absence of orders by providing the platoon leaders with opportunities to practice exercising disciplined initiative. With mission orders in hand and a firm understanding of the commander's intent, each platoon leader gains decision-making experience by making and explaining their decisions through multiple tactical vignettes on varying terrain, against diverse enemy sets, and with different task organizations. Their competence improves as they

learn from the outcomes of their decisions and those of their peers. The battalion commander also makes clear to the platoon leaders what to take away from each repetition and in doing so invests in the future success of each of the platoon leaders and the ability of the unit to maximize the application of the mission command philosophy. Such tactical decision games are an easily repeatable and low-cost way to foster a mission command mindset and an understanding of what constitutes disciplined initiative in combat.

Living by Mission Orders

On the battlefield, there are no memorandums of instruction or policy letters that guide leaders' decision-making. Instead, troop leading procedures (TLP) and the military decision-making process (MDMP) inform the production of five-paragraph field orders. Many times, orders must be delivered verbally over the radio or by a runner in a single written copy. These mission orders are directive but are free from small details that seldom survive the passage of time or contact with the enemy.

As highlighted in the first article of this series, leaders and observer-controller/trainers at the U.S. Army's combat training centers recently noted that brigade and battalion operations orders (OPORDs) were often too long, contained too much extraneous detail, and arrived too late.² Additionally, as noted in the article, the observer-controller/trainers observed that company commanders often do not

share the battalion commanders' intent with

their subordinates. This failure to employ timely mission orders takes time away from subordinate leader planning and preparation time, jeopardizes shared understanding of the mission down to the lowest level, and risks confusion and inaction by subordinate leaders when conditions on the ground make the plan untenable.

To be clear, a "mission order" is not a type of order. It is rather a disciplined approach to written or verbal orders that requires competent subordinates and a culture of trust in subordinate decision-making and initiative to work. Mission orders are concise and simple directives that tell subordinate leaders *what* to do, not *how* to do it. Mission orders require confirmation briefs as a check on both the clarity of a given order and subordinate leaders' understanding of it. If two of five company commanders are not able to quickly confirm their understanding of the mission, the commander's intent, the concept of the operation, and the required unit tasks—it is probably not a good order.

Living by mission orders starts every day in garrison, not just at the combat training centers or during operations. Operating from short, simple, and effective mission orders takes practice. Another easily repeatable and low-cost way to provide frequent and repetitive mission command training experiences is to use mission orders for everything, every day. For example, use them for planning and executing an organization day, performing command maintenance, or conducting a combined-arms live-fire exercise—every repetition of TLP, MDMP, and OPORD production counts toward fostering the mission command culture. When requiring more control over an operation, commanders can use back briefs,

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rehearsals, and in-process reviews without violating the principle of mission orders. When the risk to mission or force is high, mission command leaders can use more than one in-process review or rehearsal to increase leader interaction without compromising trust in subordinate leaders' decision-making and initiative.

Living by Commander's Intent

The objective of commander's intent is to instill and empower disciplined initiative in every member of the team. It is a thoughtful act by the commander, not the staff. Commander's intent is a concise statement of the operation's broad objective or desired outcome that is clear, simple, and easy to remember. Developing commander's intent takes practice and should not resemble a concept of the operation. The commander's intent unites an organization with purpose, provides shared understanding of what must be accomplished, and issues a call to action.

A clear commander's intent provides opportunities for subordinates' initiative in all contexts, even those contexts that require adherence to specific procedures

A German self-propelled gun smolders along the road leading from Neuville-au-Plain to Sainte-Mère-Église June 1944 after being destroyed by Pvt. John E. Atchley, H Company, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Atchley's actions (see award citation, page 6) exemplify the type of initiative and bias for action mission command training aims to promote. (Photo from the U.S. Army Signal Corps, gift of Maude Hayman, The National World War II Museum collection. Information verified on 1 July 2019 by Pfc. Leslie P. Cruise—a member of the unit when the action took place—that the vehicle depicted was indeed the one destroyed by Atchley.)

for the organization to succeed—like maintenance or command supply discipline. Leaders fully invested in mission command reduce or eliminate prescriptive policy letters in favor of inspiring the right actions across the organization, whatever the context. This builds a climate and culture where trust, teamwork, and unit cohesion can flourish.

To focus training, commanders provide annual training guidance as well as guidance for specific training

events. They describe what needs to be accomplished in terms of training objectives and leave subordinate leaders free to assess their unit's proficiency and prioritize training tasks, resources, and time available to achieve the objectives. *That guidance is the commander's intent issued through mission orders.* Monthly unit status reporting and quarterly training briefs provide confirmation back to the commander that subordinate units are either accomplishing the commander's intent or require increased leader interaction to do so. In either case, commander-to-commander dialogue ensures the readiness of units while protecting the mutual trust between the leader and the led.

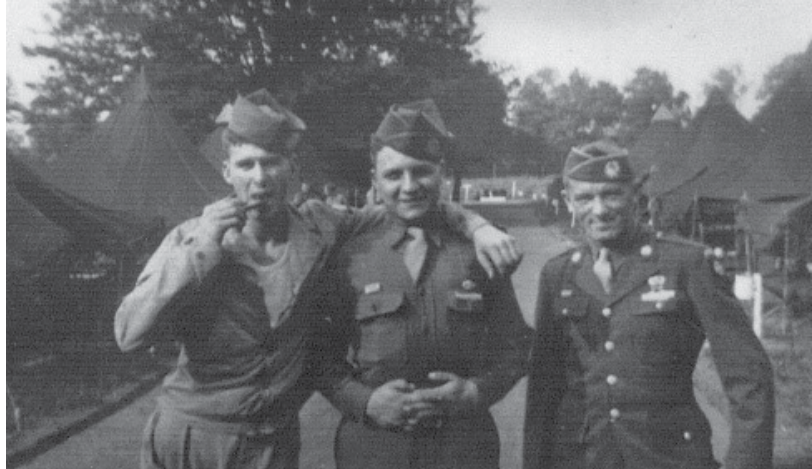
Instilling Disciplined Initiative

Every individual from the highest commander to the lowest private must always remember that inaction and neglect of opportunities will warrant more severe censure than an error of judgment in the action taken. The criterion by which a commander judges the soundness of his own decision is whether it will further the intentions of the higher commander.

—Field Manual 100-5, *Field Service Regulations: Operations*, 22 May 1941³

What is “disciplined initiative”? Simply put, it is when subordinates have the discipline to follow their orders and adhere to the plan until they realize their orders and the plan no longer fit the situation they find themselves in. This may occur because the enemy has done something not foreseen in the plan; a new, more serious threat has emerged; or the enemy has presented a golden opportunity that outweighs the objectives of the original plan, which must be seized and taken advantage of. The subordinate leader then uses his or her initiative to determine and take an action that fits the new situation in a manner that will achieve the commander's intent.

It is under extraordinary circumstances that a private will make decisions that impact the mission of a battalion, but it is not unusual for a junior soldier or leader to be forward enough to see the need for a new plan of action. For example, during 1983's Operation Urgent Fury in



Pvt. John E. Atchley (left), Pvt. Nicholas J. DePalma, and Pvt. Joseph J. Comer (right), paratroopers of H Company, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, pose on the company street May 1944 several weeks before D-Day at Camp Quorn, Leicestershire, England. Atchley was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions at a roadblock in Sainte-Mère-Église on 7 June 1944. The award citation (below) demonstrates how Atchley exemplified the type of initiative and bias for action mission command training aims to promote. (Photo and caption courtesy of the 505th PIR Association, <http://www.quornmuseum.com/display.php?id=520>. We express our appreciation to Pfc. Leslie P. Cruise, also a member of H Co. and friend of the soldiers depicted, who verified their identities 28 June 2019.)

The American Soldier's 'Bias' toward Action

General orders:

Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 31 (July 1, 1944)

Citation:

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Private John E. Atchley (ASN: 34505971), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company H, 3d Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82d Airborne Division, in action against enemy forces on 7 June 1944, in France. When the enemy counterattacked with tanks in the vicinity of Ste. Mere Eglise, one of the very few antitank guns at the disposal of the defending force had been put out of action due to the fact that most of the members of its crew were casualties. As the enemy tanks approached, Private Atchley, despite the fact that he had never previously fired an anti-tank gun, left his place of cover and fearlessly moved over to man the gun. Although without aid, Private Atchley's second shot destroyed one of the advancing tanks, whereupon the other tanks turned about and retreated. The courage, daring, and complete disregard for his life displayed by Private Atchley reflects great credit upon himself and is in keeping with the highest traditions of the Armed Forces.



Grenada, during the execution of a strategic mission, a unit found itself cut off, under heavy fire, and without communications to coordinate required support to accomplish its mission. Then, one leader took the initiative. Finding no other options, he pulled out a credit card and called long distance to Fort Bragg from a still-functioning telephone to route a request for fire support. It worked!⁴

Fog, friction, and chance in war force plans to change. These changes frequently shift the point of decision down to the leaders closest to the problem. To be effective in combat, the best leaders deliberately build these uncertain conditions into their training. This means focusing training repetitions on our most junior leaders so they develop the good tactical judgment essential in the relationship of mutual trust between leaders and subordinates. It is impossible to instill initiative in leaders during training if the plan is always right, if the size and location of the enemy force are always where the intelligence officer templates, or if the higher headquarters is always easily reached through tactical communications when someone requires a decision. Training that does not

Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 151st Infantry Regiment, complete their live-fire training exercise 3 November 2018 at the Joint Readiness Training Center in Fort Polk, Louisiana. This training requires soldiers to be able to move and maneuver as a team using live ammunition. (Photo by Sgt. Aimee Shatto, U.S. Army)

incorporate uncertainty inherent in armed conflict falls short of building a culture of trust in subordinate decision-making and initiative. Our junior leaders are the most likely to be in a position to see the need for a new plan of action when operations do not unfold as foreseen. They must be smart enough to realize this, smart enough to come up with a plan that will work, and have the guts and trust to execute—even when out of communications with higher.

A way to inject uncertainty in training is to intentionally create inconsistencies between the OPORD and what subordinates encounter during execution. These differences should not just provide an opportunity for disciplined initiative but require it for mission accomplishment. These differences could include repositioning the enemy force some distance off the



unit's templated objective. Or, it can be as simple as an ambush during a tactical movement in an area reported cleared of enemy forces. Other scenario injects could be as significant as a change of mission when en route to the objective with a new and more time-sensitive mission such as a downed pilot recovery operation, or by planting an OPFOR headquarters just across their adjacent boundary but where the unit is sure to find it. It could also be as complex as making the primary objective merely a stepping-stone to an unknown and more important objective—discoverable only after the unit seizes the primary objective and exercises initiative to conduct sensitive site exploitation and questioning of prisoners of war that reveal clues about what the final objective actually needs to be. What will our subordinate leaders do? Will they continue with their assigned tasks, or will they have the initiative to do more?

Conclusion

Throughout the “Reinvigorating the Army’s Approach to Command and Control” series of articles, our intent has been clear—to reinvigorate our

Capt. Wade Redenius (*right*) discusses the plan for an upcoming mission with 1st Lt. Ross McDonald and 2nd Lt. Tony Eshoo of 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division 19 September 2018 during Engineering Change Proposal Stryker testing at Yakima Training Center, Washington. (Photo by Maj. Sonie Munson, U.S. Army)

conversation about and practice of mission command in our Army. We began by identifying how we arrived at present challenges and described a way ahead with the pending update to Army Doctrine Publication 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*.⁵ We followed that first article with a second that explained how to lead by mission command.⁶ In this third and final article, we have argued that training for mission command is essential to building ready and lethal combat units. To achieve that goal, Army leaders at all levels must seize every opportunity to apply the principles of mission command and create a unit climate and culture where it can flourish.

We do not know when or where the Army will fight its next first battle. The nature of that fight

will be no more certain than it was at Trenton on Christmas Day in 1776, or no less chaotic than it was in Normandy with airborne drops behind German lines in June 1944. We do know the form of that next first fight will be a rapidly changing and continuous and violent contest of wills between at least two combatants in multiple domains. To win that fight, our Army must establish a tempo of decision and action and intensity of operations the

enemy force cannot match. The mission command approach helps us achieve that.

Mission command is the only way to lead a winning Army. Without it, we lose the strategic advantage that has been with us since 1776—the ingenuity, can-do attitude, initiative, and bias toward action of the American soldier. It is up to each of us to reinvigorate mission command. How we lead and train it today will shape how we will fight and win tomorrow. ■

Notes

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5. Townsend, Crissman, and McCoy, "Reinvigorating the Army's Approach to Mission Command"; Army Doctrine Publication 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, forthcoming).

6. Stephen J. Townsend, Gary Brito, Douglas Crissman, and Kelly McCoy, "Reinvigorating the Army's Approach to Mission Command: Leading by Mission Command (Part 2)," *Military Review* 99, no. 4 (July-August 2019): 6–12.

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