



The 2nd Brigade Combat Team sets up a hasty command post 20 February 2015 on a hilltop a few miles from the Rotational Unit Bivouac Area of the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California, in order to guide units into position. The tactical operations center is a mobile platform for the brigade commander to use to direct the battle. (Photo by Staff Sgt. John Healy, U.S. Army)

Command Post Operations

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CPs [command posts] are facilities that include personnel, equipment, information systems, and networks, guided by processes and procedures that assist commanders in the exercise of mission command. Commanders employ CPs to help control operations through continuity, planning, coordination, and synchronizing of the warfighting functions.

—Army Techniques Publication 6-0.5, *Command Post Organization and Operations*

One hot summer day at the National Training Center (NTC), I (Cecil) spent most of the afternoon riding around in my Bradley Fighting Vehicle as part of the mobile tactical command post. Meanwhile, the main command post controlled two lines of effort: planning for our next phase of the operation and shaping the deep fight—or at least it controlled one of the two efforts, since the main command post lost communications. Just after dusk, while en route to the main command post, we snuck by the opposing force that was in concealed positions, waiting for an unsuspecting target of opportunity. Their intention, as our blue forces passed by

undetected, was to unleash destruction and then watch us sit in wait while our rotating amber beacons lit up the sky.

Shortly after arriving, it became apparent that the main had been receiving indirect fire for most of the day and was struggling to man and troubleshoot our mission command information systems. The main seemed unconcerned with the lack of communication with subordinate units since the officer in charge presumed the mobile tactical command post was controlling the fight. With the entire unit staff now collocated at the main, we massed efforts to reestablish communications and began requesting situation reports from our subordinate units. We soon found out that our subordinate companies came under attack, and the lack of communications with the main command post had prevented higher echelon assets from being retasked to mitigate the effects of the attack. Why is it that my unit struggled so much?

Combat training centers like the NTC and focused organizations like the Mission Command Training Program (MCTP) provide opportunities to train and employ mission command from command posts in various scenarios. Over the last year and a half, I have participated in fourteen warfighter exercises (WFXs) as an observer coach/trainer for Operations Group—Charlie (OG-C) of the MCTP. These WFXs use computer simulations to train active duty, Army Reserve, and National Guard brigade and division headquarters in the planning, preparation, and execution of unified land operations in a decisive action training environment. A common observation for brigades is poor efficiency and marginally effective synchronization between command posts due to friction in manning and equipping, and because of poor delineation of command post roles and responsibilities.

Troubleshooting Command Post Manning SOPs

The first challenge units struggle with during WFXs is integrating liaison officers (LNOs), noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and special staff for information-related capabilities. Personnel are assigned according to Department of the Army manning levels and their modified tables of organization and equipment. These manning levels and a lack of definition in unit standard operating procedures (SOPs) result in personnel having an unclear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Often, they are not employed effectively, and they have more assigned duties than they can accomplish.

Liaison officers. Field Manual (FM) 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*, delineates the responsibilities of LNOs: “Liaison officers are the commander’s representative at the headquarters or agency to which they are sent. They promote coordination, synchronization, and cooperation between their parent unit and unit in which they are temporarily assigned.”¹ Units will often provide LNOs at higher echelons, but few use them effectively. By not clearly defining an LNO’s specific role, units miss opportunities to integrate LNOs into the military decision-making process and battle rhythm events, diminishing the benefits of a fully synchronized parallel planning process and the ability to share information.

Noncommissioned officers. Units struggle to integrate NCOs into staff processes at the brigade level. Staff officers do not provide sufficient guidance or direction to enlisted personnel, amplifying an overall lack

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of staff NCOs' understanding of their roles and responsibilities. NCOs can make significant contributions if given an opportunity and sufficient guidance. Their contributions during various steps of the military decision-making process and tools gathering can greatly enhance a unit's timely production of an order or provide subject-matter expertise within the warfighting functions (Wffs).

Information-related capabilities staff. Through improved utilization of NCO expertise, a unit can better orchestrate across Wff roles, such as information-related

Mission Command Information System Readiness

In conjunction with well-vetted and practiced SOPs written specifically by owning units, Army-wide mission command information systems (MCISs) are used as a way to create a vital common operational picture with which commanders at all levels can successfully exercise mission command.³ When used properly, MCISs allow soldiers to obtain an automated view of friendly activity and movement, plan fires, receive

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capabilities. Often, units fail to integrate information-related capabilities due to poorly manned special staff sections such as information operations, public affairs, military information support operations, electronic warfare, and civil affairs. Units provide minimal coverage by assigning these special staff duties to one officer or NCO who may not possess the requisite knowledge to best perform the duty. This person is quickly overwhelmed and unable to fulfill a majority of his or her responsibilities.

Reflecting on my experiences at the NTC and during brigade WFXs, a solution to mitigate these staffing issues is the clear codification of roles and responsibilities for critical and special duty positions, such as LNO or knowledge management officer, into a commander-endorsed SOP. These SOPs should require battalions to provide commander-approved LNOs that will best represent their organization in the brigade command post. SOPs should also codify roles and responsibilities of enlisted personnel and special staff, and incorporate roles and responsibilities of the NCOs that are published in *The Staff Noncommissioned Officer's Handbook* and FM 6-0 for special staff personnel.²

It would also be beneficial for units to coordinate formal training and incorporate cross training to relieve the burden on low-density skills while developing depth within the staff. Once SOPs are refined, units should rehearse roles and responsibilities and execute drills to allow personnel to better learn their roles on the staff and validate unit SOPs prior to execution.

situation and intelligence reports, view airspace, and receive automatically disseminated weather reports. However, units often arrive at WFXs with little to no experience using MCISs and are unable to maximize their contributions while maintaining accuracy and redundant backups with analog products.

Specialized soldiers are military-occupation-al-skill-qualified on systems within their purview, but are at times not afforded enough training to stay current as system operators. This indicates that units are not investing the time to train individually or collectively. With this lack of experience, units fail to effectively develop MCIS architectures and maintain the equipment, specifically during the first few days of a WFX when soldiers have to relearn how to operate their systems. A key component to mission command is gaining shared understanding.⁴ Units that are not able to understand how to use MCIS struggle to provide the commander with situational awareness of the tactical environment, the enemy situation, and themselves.

In retrospect, the training and equipping problems units struggle through are the same issues my unit had when we were unable to troubleshoot and man equipment after taking indirect fires. Knowing what I do now, I would have sent soldiers to the Digital Master Gunner Course to better develop skill sets and shared understanding in my formation. Also, units should focus more on training and exercising their systems at their home station during available training time

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to raise the level of experience and confidence of the soldiers that will operate these systems.

SOPs for Command Post Roles, Responsibilities, and Purpose

A common observation with brigades, including my own unit at the NTC, is a lack of SOPs that clearly define roles, responsibilities, and purposes for the main and tactical command posts. During planning and preparation, the lack of these SOPs hinders command post integration during rehearsals and other preparatory training exercises. Thus, during the WFX, units are unable to effectively provide mission command while accurately battle tracking throughout the course of the operation. This lack of SOPs between the main and tactical command post can also cause duplicated reporting and conflicting directives, resulting in confusion throughout the brigade staff, current operations integration cell, and subordinate battalions.

In order to best exercise mission command from the main and tactical command posts, units must delineate and deconflict roles between the two command posts. In order to maximize available collective training opportunities, this is best done during training events leading up to a WFX. Rehearsals and/or education of newly implemented SOPs is paramount as this will

enable the staff and key leaders to have a clear understanding of their purpose and roles.

By utilizing a well-developed, command-endorsed SOP that contains clear definitions of purpose, roles, and responsibilities, command posts can more effectively serve as a command-and-control hub and assist the commander in synchronizing operations. However, units are not effectively manning, equipping, or delineating roles and responsibilities between command posts. LNOs, NCOs, and special staff do not have defined SOPs or a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities within the command post. This is exacerbated by a significant underutilization of our NCOs and a lack of their integration into staff processes. There is also a lack of experience and training on MCISs, which hinders the staff's ability to maintain situational awareness and communicate. Lastly, command posts do not have defined roles, responsibilities, and an understood purpose, which hinders units from exercising effective mission command. Command posts must be manned with the appropriate and trained personnel, be designed and equipped with the appropriate MCIS, and be backed up by command-approved SOPs to effectively and efficiently execute the command post functions and support the commander's decision-making. ■

Notes

Epigraph. Army Techniques Publication 6-0.5, *Command Post Organization and Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 1 March 2017), 1-1.

1. Field Manual 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, April 2016, changes 1 and 2).

2. Ibid.; *The Staff Noncommissioned Officer's Handbook*, FY 2016 revised ed. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Army National Guard Training

Centers, Training Analysis Feedback Team, October 2015), accessed 28 February 2018, <https://bootcampmilitaryfitnessinstitute.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/02-staff-ncos-handbook-the-2015-10.pdf>.

3. U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, "Mission Command Digital Master Gunner," Stand-To website, 17 May 2016, accessed 28 February 2018, https://www.army.mil/standto/archive_2016-05-17.

4. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, May 2012, changes 1 and 2).