



Fulfilling the Promise A Joint Corps for a Joint Military

Lieutenant Colonel Paul Darling, Alaska National Guard, and
Lieutenant Justin Lawlor, U.S. Naval Reserve

Lieutenant Colonel Paul Darling is a member of the Alaska National Guard where he commands the 207th Training Regiment. He holds a B.S. from the U.S. Military Academy and an M.S. from the University of Missouri, Rolla. He previously served as the provincial lead mentor in Zabul Province, Afghanistan.

Lieutenant Justin Lawlor is in the U.S. Naval Reserve and currently a student in the Command and General Staff College Intermediate Level Education class 2012-02 at Fort Leavenworth, KS.

PHOTO U.S. Army LTC John E. Rhodes, right, commander of the United Nations Command Security Battalion-Joint Security Area, and his deputy, LTC Jung Hae-In, from the Republic of Korea Army, discuss a joint evacuation exercise held on Camp Bonifas, Republic of Korea, 23 February 2009. (U.S. Army, SGT Christopher Paul)

BARRETT TILLMAN WRITES, “Long before jointness became doctrine and purple entered the military vocabulary, U.S. naval and air forces were operating hand in glove in a manner not possible today. The best example remains the Doolittle Raid against Japan . . . a bold concept devised by a naval officer—a submariner, no less—and executed by sailors and airmen.”*

For almost 30 years, the Department of Defense (DOD) has formally wrestled with “joint operations,” with varying degrees of success. Despite almost universal agreement on its importance, the idea of joint operations remains more of a personnel management reality than an operational one. Starting in the mid-1970s, the DOD has attempted a bureaucratic top-down implementation of joint operations that all four service cultures have resisted with great success. The successful “purple-suited” officer simply doesn’t exist in a meaningful way within the DOD.

Decades of unsustainable military spending papered over many of these issues, as budgetary pie slices were large enough to isolate the services from one another. However, the likely enduring global operational environment and future manning realities stemming from coming budgetary constraints makes change imperative. The DOD budget appears to be on the chopping block for the foreseeable future. All discretionary spending will be crowded out by entitlements and servicing the growing debt. This reality alone makes the existing DOD joint calculus obsolete. A new version of “joint” is needed. It must be organic to the DOD but amenable to other government participation, adaptable for *in extremis* operational design and planning, and capable of sustaining long-term force generation requirements. It requires a true joint officer, as part of a corps of such men and women.

A Bureaucratic Shift

The newest Army Doctrinal Publication 3-0 should prompt the military to field and fight the joint force in the manner intended, something not accomplished by current joint doctrine. For the cadre of experienced officers coming out of the nation's recent wars, the promise of joint execution has been a mixed success. Now is the time to capitalize on that experience. A restructuring of the DOD officer corps, something on par with reforms of the National Security Act of 1947, is called for and appropriate.

Such a bureaucratic shift requires flexibility, adaptability, and intentional planning that our current system barely accomplishes, and then nearly in spite of itself. The effective emplacement and employment of the full range of combat forces in a joint environment requires an exacting synchronization of military and nonmilitary elements. This synchronization in turn requires officers and leaders with broad knowledge of the capabilities and limitations of all facets of American power. Our current systems of officer development and training often fail this most crucial test. We then rely on our technological overmatch and individual excellence to carry the day. Neither condition is a given, and we must look to create more effective military minds. Joint planning has widely been hailed as part of the solution, but is its current execution part of the problem?

The concept of joint operations in its current incarnation is not a synergistic combination of the various branches of service. The reality of "joint" is its existence as the fifth branch of service. An officer completing a joint tour has not learned much about other branches aside from stories around the water cooler. Rather, he has learned "the joint world." The requirement for joint experience as a prerequisite for general officer creates a dynamic whereby the most talented officers from all branches avoid their mandated joint tour until already successful at the lieutenant colonel and colonel (O5 /O6) level, and thus are practically ensured of future success. A quick joint tour allows this officer to "punch his ticket," remain competitive for promotion, and quickly retreat back to his branch of service.

The adage that good generals command divisions and wings and that promising admirals command fleets is universally accepted. Maximum service in these divisions, wings, and fleets as field grade officers is rightly seen as the best training for future senior

commanders. The most successful of these officers, some having avoided joint duty for 26 of their first 30 years of service, are then in position to compete for the coveted combatant commands, assured that their branch specific experience and success is the best indicator of future success managing assets of which they have little knowledge or experience. Multiple joint assignments prior to attaining flag rank are generally perceived by selection boards as an indicator of mediocre performance and commensurately minimal potential for promotion. Officers in such positions often scramble to find service specific assignments to "re-blue" or "re-green" in hopes of strengthening their promotion potential. This is often an exercise in futility.

Even the current "joint" combatant commands themselves are *de facto* nearly branch specific. Transportation Command and Northern Command are both largely the domain of the Air Force. Strategic Command has been, with one exception, an Air Force or Navy command. Pacific Command is historically an exclusive Navy billet. European Command was an Army and Air Force slot, but now is open to every service. However, this inclusion does not reflect an adoption of jointness, but rather an acknowledgement of Europe's diminished importance. Southern Command has been primarily the Army's domain. The once ignored, but now glamorous Central Command (encompassing the Middle East), has usually been split between the Army and Marines. As *Defense News* highlighted last year, the Air Force, while quite comfortable with its own reserved "joint" commands, feels that Central Command should be opened up to Air Force officers despite the vast majority of the operations being on the ground.

Manning these most important commands does not appear to be a debate of who is most qualified, but rather a debate over which service has its turn for the billet. Interservice rivalry, the mitigation of which was one of joint doctrine's reasons for being, can appear at times to trump qualifications. But the Air

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(U.S. Army, SPC Andrew Ingram)

U.S. Army SGT Michael Peterson, left, requests fire support while U.S. Air Force SSgt Nate Corean supervises during Joint Tactical Air Controller/Joint Forward Observer training at the Besmaya Range Complex near Baghdad, Iraq, 18 March 2011.

Force has a valid point. The officers commanding these joint commands are not necessarily the most “joint” in their experience. They are the best each branch of service has to offer to then compete at the highest levels. When Air Force generals come up short in the most important of all commands, as Central Command is rightly viewed, it can be seen as a rebuke to the rejected services.

“Jointness” in its current incarnation was a congressional mandate in response to high-profile failures during the invasion of Grenada and the 1980 hostage rescue attempt in Iran. Seeing the lack of interservice cooperation and its deadly ramifications, Congress mandated a fix that appears to have created a whole batch of flag billets but no great improvement in military cooperation. DOD has succeeded in spite of, not because of, this current vision of jointness. We have to do better, and we can grow where joint seems to work best, at the operational level.

A Necessity for the Future

A new type of “joint” is now no longer just operationally desirable, but necessary to the future of the DOD. Instead of a top-down directive, a more organic bottom-up methodology should achieve lasting effects and ensure continued viability. A two-tiered officer model should be adopted by all services. In this model, a line officer as a captain/lieutenant (O3) will elect one of two tracks, a service track or a joint track. Within the service track, the officer could pursue the traditional tracks of education and experience to compete for command within his community and service. On the joint side, the officer could follow a track that, while building on a basis of his original community and service, would include significant exposure to other services, with mandatory cross-assignments, and postings at rank-appropriate intervals at the key staff or executive officer level.

Assignments could be made with an eye to not only the officer's original branch of service but his geographical experience and civilian education. All services would be required to code these joint slots as broadly as possible to make the cross-fertilization work. A much more holistic model could be used in promotion and assignment with an eye towards development of truly joint officers.

An example would be a Marine Corps artilleryman who makes the transition to the joint corps. His next assignment could be as an operations officer in an Army infantry battalion. He would be expected to acquire a nonbase branch professional military education (PME). In this example, PME would be attendance at the Air Staff College with follow-on assignment to an F-15E wing working targeting issues. After three operational tours in three different branches of service, the senior major or junior lieutenant colonel would have his first "joint tour" employing his joint operational targeting expertise as part of the Joint Forces Air Component Command, Land Component Command or Combatant Command J-2, J-3, or J-5. A return to stateside might see that officer attending the Naval War College and a tour afloat assigned to a Ticonderoga class cruiser. After reaching O6, this hypothetical officer, while retaining his Marine Corps uniform and heritage, will have been immersed in each service. He will have gained a deep working knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of military force along the total continuum of operations and across the various components. Should his career stop at this point, he will have infused his various units with not only the famous Marine Corps ethos, but with the best practices of each branch and headquarters he worked with. Further, he would have had a career that, while lacking in command, included more valuable troop time than those careers of most of his commanders.

The goal, of course, is that this time in our putative artilleryman's career will be merely prologue to future assignments of greater responsibility. The

concept of joint should not be limited to uniformed service. A two-year stint with the State Department could serve to unite the Departments of Defense and State. As it stands now, the complex issues of 21st-century warfare find these two critical components of diplomacy often at odds, if not near open conflict, with each other.

Likewise, the flag officer would do well to learn the critical skills of diplomacy from the acknowledged experts. A joint-tracked intelligence officer might find herself at the CIA, or elsewhere in the intelligence community. An Army logistician or Navy supply officer could conceivably match with Department of Transportation or Commerce. A final investment in a Ph.D. would produce an officer truly prepared for joint thinking and operations. As the J3 or other key flag billet, he would be uniquely qualified and respected. The synergistic permutations are endless. Examples could include an Air Force space and missile officer serving aboard an Ohio Class SSBN, an Army aviator assigned to flying duty with USAF Combat Search and Rescue, or a Navy SEAL billeted as an operations officer of a Ranger battalion. These initial assignments would culminate in the true end state of a joint corps: ultimately, an Army logistician commanding Transportation Command or an Air Force missileer commanding at Camp Smith or a surface warfare officer heading Africa Command. But these title trivialities would be in name only. In fact, it would simply be an amazingly qualified and trained joint officer in a joint command. Those officers who chose to remain in their basic branch would still be eligible for service chiefs of staff, service commands, operational units, and training units without the need to do the perfunctory "joint" tour in its current incarnation. There would no longer be interservice rivalry for who would command the joint theater commands as the ownership of these flags would belong completely and unquestionably to this proposed joint corps.

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Such officers would be selected for promotion and assignment based upon joint corps specific evaluations and boarded by officers similarly assigned to the joint corps. What an F-16 squadron commander sees as outstanding attributes may not be what is required for a successful joint corps officer. Professional curiosity and ability to adapt and learn to new cultures would be the primary drivers of success, rather than piloting ability, ship handling, or maneuver brilliance. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the secretary of defense should control this group of officers. We will not need another four-star headquarters for this joint concept, as the framework already exists.

The U.S. military is uniquely suited to make this work. The noncommissioned officer corps in each branch would be the honest broker to ensure that cross-trained officers derived the right lessons from their experiences and to ensure the officer's deficiencies in experience were compensated for accordingly. The overall size of the DOD makes this cross-fertilization feasible.

Naturally, an air force pilot assigned to a marine infantry battalion would not be as effective as a ground combat marine officer. The timing of these cross-pollination assignments may possibly preclude combat deployments. However, the deployment experience of joint corps officers would primarily occur at the combatant command level where their experience and education would be best employed. Within joint commands you would still find base component officers, but now serving as deputies and assistants where their service specific expertise would advise joint officers. Professionally, the lack of command opportunities could be mitigated by the breadth of experience and preponderance of flag billets with the obvious culmination of having the combatant commands and subordinate joint task forces reserved solely for the joint corps officer.

The base service components would benefit as their core strengths would be more clearly understood by joint commanders who right now are experienced primarily in their own component of origin. Outstanding officers would have more command opportunities as the joint corps would draw some of their peer competitors away. The commanders of our warfighting units would enjoy maximum time serving in them and would benefit from even more experience than they currently expect. The best practices of each

service would be spread far and wide. Occasional distrust or even disdain of sister services would not be eliminated, but would certainly be reduced at all ranks and echelons as the differences in service cultures would be better understood in context.

Exchange Tours

While current exchange tours exist, these tours are often considered career limiting, and often broaden the view of the officer in only a limited fashion. A Marine Corps aviator integrating into an Air Force F-16 squadron does provide needed perspective, but only within the strike aviation framework. To achieve real and practical effects of combined arms operations, planning, and managing across the spectrum of combat and non-combat power is required. Ultimately the goal of a greatly expanded joint corps would be to build, through concrete training and experience, the knowledge required to do this.

Currently, we do exchanges between services, and with our allies. Indeed, many services have explored partnering with civilian institutions to adopt best practices. However, we need this codified and expanded. This expansion should start with the exchange within inherently joint services, like the Army National Guard and Air National Guard on the Reserve Component side, and the Navy and Marine Corps on the Active Component side. After this integration into the Reserve Component with others, integration within the active duty elements would logically follow. Rather than the exception, a cross-assigned officer should be the rule throughout the tactical units.

We are doing this now in a limited and ad hoc fashion with the Air Force and Navy Individual Augmentees currently serving deployed. During assignment to the ISAF Regional Police Advisory Command-South Headquarters, one author was fortunate to have been assigned a young naval surface warfare officer recently promoted to O3. His natural abilities allowed him to quickly integrate to our staff, and he was soon providing not only a quality product, but also giving the Army-dominated staff a different look born of his experience at sea. Likewise, his own incorporation of army tactical operations center procedures benefitted his development as well. Where he was deficient in experience, our noncommissioned officers compensated, and we were certainly a stronger staff because of his



(U.S. Air Force, SSgt. Jonathan Lovelady)

U.S. soldiers with the 4th Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group, secure their jump gear and prepare to board a U.S. Air Force KC-130 Hercules aircraft at the John C. Stennis Space Center during Emerald Warrior 2011, 8 March 2011.

inclusion, rather than in spite of it. Ironically, until only recently, this officer's year assigned to the Army in Kandahar City did not count as a joint tour, regardless of the actual benefit both he and the Army gained from his deployment.

In the near future, American military operations will be stressed by concurrent operational demands and material limitations unprecedented in our nation's history. At few other times have our responsibilities been so global. Our responsibilities as officers to "America's sons and daughters" demand we springboard off Army Doctrinal Publication 3-0 to seize the high ground of joint operations as many have imagined it should be.

What the Future Holds

If we codify and expand this kind of service, the benefits to the Department of Defense as a whole would be manifest. No longer will parochial concerns of component prestige possibly dictate mission assignments by joint commanders. Institutional stovepipes, built during World War II, reinforced during the Cold War, and reflecting bureaucratic sensitivities of times gone by, are

simply inadequate to deal with the current array of threats, our operational reality, and likely future resource constraints. As a military, we are going to be continually tasked to do more with less. The establishment of a joint corps would be a positive first step to preserving our capabilities within a framework of resource constraints as opposed to warfighting necessity as was originally envisioned for the nascent DOD by both the McNarney Plan in 1944 and the Collins Plan in 1945, which both proposed a separate procurement service at the same authority level as, and completely separate from, the Departments of Army, Navy and Air Force.

Such a joint corps putting its weight behind procurement could alleviate concerns that procurement revolves around service prestige and political considerations as opposed to warfighting necessity. With loyalty (and promotion potential) in the hands of the joint corps, only professional competence and intellectual honesty should dictate further advancement. Finally, we will bring to fruition the true potential for jointness as was first hinted at almost 70 years ago when a submariner's ideas culminated in a daring raid on Tokyo. **MR**

NOTE

*Barrett Tilman. "Into the Rising Sun: The Doolittle Raid," *Proceedings*, April 2007, vol. 133/4/1,250, available at <<http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2007-04/rising-sun-doolittle-raid>>.