

U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Shelby Johnson, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, scans the horizon, 18 November 2013, during a dismounted patrol from Forward Operating Base Torkham to an Afghan Border Police checkpoint near the village of Goloco.

(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Eric Provost, Task Force Patriot PAO)



Noncommissioned Officers and Mission Command

Sgt. Maj. Dennis Eger, U.S. Army

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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.¹ Not only has the content of doctrine been updated,



An Afghan National Army command sergeant major records a message about the Afghanistan most-wanted high-value insurgents for transmission on the radio, Forward Operating Base Shank, Logar Province, Afghanistan, 18 January 2012. The sergeant major is informing the people of Afghanistan about the crimes and atrocities the individuals have committed and is asking for information about them.

but a new publications hierarchy has led to the transfer of certain doctrinal subjects from field manuals to new publications 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*.²

Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Raymond Odierno has, 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."³ 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 risk⁴

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."⁵ 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."⁶ 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



Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas R. Capel, International Security Assistance Force and U.S. Forces - Afghanistan, speaks with a group of first sergeants, sergeants major, and command sergeants major of the 159th Combat Aviation Brigade on Kandahar Airfield, 17 January 2012. Capel met with soldiers and senior enlisted service members to gain a better appreciation for their challenges and successes in the region.

Sgt. Amanda Hills, 319th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

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.⁷

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.⁸ 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 outside the organization

The commander drives the operations process by understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing operations.⁹

As commanders use the mission command warfighting 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



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Audie Smitley discusses which equipment is best suited for future route clearance patrols with German combat engineers from Task Force Kunduz, 8 March 2011. U.S. Army and German combat engineers trained together to form a combined coalition route clearance team that would eventually include Afghanistan engineers.

Spc. David Huddleston, 18th Engineer Brigade

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.



Spc. Amber Leach, Combat Camera Afghanistan

U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Isaia Vimoto, 1st Cavalry Division, speaks to soldiers in Afghanistan, 18 January 2012.

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 6-0 for a complete list of tasks). For example, NCOs are subject matter experts in cyber electromagnetic activities and knowledge management and in installing, operating, and maintaining the network.

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. *Doctrine 2015* refers to a major reorganization of doctrinal publications, begun in 2011 and expected to be complete in 2015. The purpose is to reduce their length and number, reduce development time, and enhance collaboration and accessibility through technology.

2. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 2012); Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington DC: U.S. GPO, 2012).

3. ADP 6-0, 1.

4. *Ibid.*, 2.

5. ADRP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, (Washington DC: U.S. GPO, 2012), 3-2.

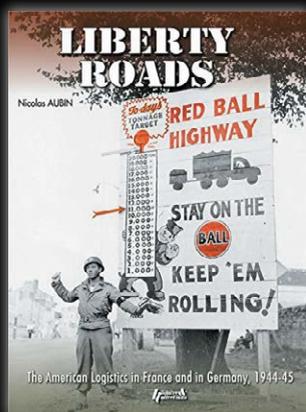
6. ADP 6-0, 11.

7. ADRP 6-2, 3-9.

8. *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: U.S. GPO, 11 August 2011).

9. ADRP 6-0, 3-2.

MR We Recommend



Liberty Roads

Nicholas Aubin, Histoire & Collections - Casemate, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2014, 220 pages, \$55.00

The Red Ball Express Highway is the nickname given to the supply route opened in August 1944 that stretched from the landing beaches to the American armies launched in an incredible pursuit throughout France.

For three months, up to 6,000 trucks drove along this route. It symbolizes the opulence and power of American logistics. However, the generals complain in their memoirs about the lack of gasoline, ammunition, and even warm clothing and cigarettes. Patton thought that the rear echelon services led by General Lee had failed in their mission and delayed the end of the war. It is this paradox that led to the writing of this book. The investigation is more than just a detailed account of the campaign as seen from the rear; it is the first publication to cover in depth the American logistical effort during the Second World War in Europe. —*From the Publisher*