



Paratroopers with the 82nd Airborne Division conduct a platoon live-fire exercise during a two-week training exercise at Fort A.P. Hill, Va., March 13, 2018. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. John Lytle)

The Role of the NCO in Mission Command

By Command Sgt. Maj. Norman McAfee

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Mission command 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 decisive action. It is commander-led and blends the art of command and the science of control to integrate the war-fighting functions to accomplish the mission (*Field Manual 3-0*). In *Army Doctrine Publication 3-0*, we see a slight modification of the definition: The philosophy of mission command is the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent while guiding leaders in the execution of unified land operations. As we progressed doctrinally you can see how command

and control evolved to become mission command which assists in achieving the ultimate goal of the United States Army: prevent, shape, influence, engage, deter, and win. The noncommissioned officer's (NCO) role in mission command starts well before the exercise of command; it begins with the training environment.

The Army lives by the principle "Train as you fight" and doctrinally NCOs are the Army's primary trainers of enlisted Soldiers, crews, and small teams. Effective mission command requires Soldiers and leaders trained to operate in ill-defined, complex, and ambiguous environments. Through training, Soldiers learn how to apply disciplined initiative to act decisively while accepting prudent risks. Training assists Soldiers and leaders in developing mutual trust through a shared understanding



Sgt. 1st Class Shiloh LaTourrette, 101st Airborne Division, showcases an assault element's movement on a terrain model during a mission briefing near Yavoriv, Ukraine, Sept. 3, 2019 (U.S. Army Photo by 1st Lt. Lynn Chui)

of the unit's strengths and weaknesses. Training also reinforces the need for Soldiers and leaders to collaborate and dialog in order to achieve a greater understanding of the operational environment (ADRP 7-0). The NCO's role as trainer is only part of the dynamic in mission command; they are generally the principal advisor to commanders and are often confidants within the command team; as such, the NCO plays a crucial role in mission command.

When applying the Army's core competencies, Army leaders are guided by the mission command philosophy. NCOs assist the commander in execution of these orders as well as providing sound advice and perspective. The ability of Army forces to apply its core competencies in the creation a fluid mix of offensive, defensive, and stability operations depends on a philosophy of command that emphasizes broad mission-type orders, individual disciplined initiative within the commander's intent, and leaders who can anticipate and adapt quickly to changing conditions (ADP 3-0). Again, the NCO has an essential role in assuring these actions occur and conditions are set in order to succeed.

Mission command in the war fighting function develops and integrates those activities enabling a commander to balance the art of command and the science of control. This fundamental philosophy of command places people, rather than technology or systems, at the center. Under this philosophy, the NCO provides direction and experi-

ence in support of the commander as they drive the operations process through their activities; of understand, visualize, describe, direct, lead, and assess. They develop teams, both within their own organizations and with joint, interagency, and multinational partners. NCOs provide information and influence audiences, inside and outside their organizations. The NCO assists the commander in leading the staff's tasks under the science of control. The four primary staff tasks are conduct the operations process (plan, prepare, execute, and assess); conduct knowledge management and information management; conduct inform and influence activities; and conduct cyber electromagnetic activities (ADP 3-0).

The essence of decisive action is that Army forces combine offensive, defensive, and stability or civil support operations simultaneously as part of an interdependent joint force to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative, accepting prudent risk to create opportunities to achieve decisive results. Army forces employ synchronized action, both lethal and nonlethal, proportionate to the mission and informed by a thorough understanding of all dimensions of the operational environment. Mission command that conveys intent and an appreciation of all aspects of the situation guides the adaptive use of Army forces. Offensive and defensive tasks focus on the destructive effects of combat power; stability tasks emphasize constructive effects (ADP 3-07). The NCO's role in decisive action is crucial as they are typically on the ground leading these efforts with their small units and teams. NCOs are force multipliers for commanders and provide breadth and depth to any operation.

Effective planning also anticipates the inherent delay between decision and action, especially between the levels of war and echelons of command. Sound plans draw on the fundamentals of mission command to overcome this effect, fostering initiative within the commander's intent to act appropriately and decisively when orders no longer sufficiently address the changing situation. This ensures commanders act promptly as they encounter opportunities or accept prudent risk in order to create opportunities when they lack clear direction. In such situations, prompt action requires detailed foresight and preparation (ADP 3-07). NCOs at all levels, particularly those serving as a plans and operations sergeant, bring their experience to bear when providing their unique perspective to their officer counterpart.

Mission command requires an environment of mutual trust and shared understanding among commanders, staffs, and subordinates. The commander's intent is a clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation, the desired military end state, provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders and leaders act to achieve the commander's desired outcomes without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned (*Joint Publication 3-0*). NCOs are key to the dissemination and shared understanding of the commander's intent.

An unexpected change in conditions may require commanders to direct an abrupt transition between phases. In such cases, the overall composition of the force remains unchanged despite sudden changes in mission, task organization, and rules of engagement. Typically, task organization evolves to meet changing conditions; however, transition planning must also account for changes in the mission. Commanders attuned to sudden changes can better adapt their forces to dynamic conditions. They continuously assess the situation and task-organize and cycle their forces to retain the initiative. They strive to achieve changes in emphasis without incurring an operational pause. Commanders in the field look to their NCOs to assist in this transitional phase in order to focus on several areas at once. NCOs can help their commanders in this effort by continually assessing and providing feedback on the mission and operational variables as well as their organizational lines of effort.

As an element of combat power, leadership unifies the other elements (information, mission command, movement and maneuver, intelligence, fires, sustainment, and protection). Leadership is a multiplier of effects; with it, organizations are focused and synchronized, resources are used efficiently, people become energized and motivated, and missions are more likely to achieve desired outcomes. Leadership serves a motivational purpose: to energize others to achieve challenging goals. An organization with effective leadership has a clear purpose, common methods, and ordered processes; sustains itself; and accomplishes its missions. Effective organizations rely on leaders

to balance uncertainty, remain flexible, and provide a climate where subordinates have the latitude to explore options (*ADP 6-22*). There can be no question that NCOs are key leaders within any formation. Great organizations have great NCOs who are engaged in all facets of an operation and with their Soldiers and families.

Influence falls along a continuum from commitment, where followers willingly act for a higher purpose, to compliance, where followers merely fulfill requests and act in response to the leader's positional power. The degree to which an individual is committed or merely compliant directly affects their individual initiative, motivation to accomplish an assigned mission, and the degree of accepted responsibility. Like commanders, NCOs expect subordinate leaders and Soldiers to commit to successful mission accomplishment. Trust, commitment, and competence enable mission command and allow the freedom of action to be operationally agile and adaptive (*ADP 6-22*). NCOs in particular rely heavily on influence which is generally experienced based in order to effect action. An NCO's span of influence is only limited by their leadership and him or herself but is virtually unlimited in regards to the impact it can have on mission success.

Clearly mission command has evolved based on operational needs in an ever-changing operational environment. In times past, we prepared for future wars focused on combating like armies largely in an offensive and/or defensive posture. With the war on terror we evolved into a counter insurgency (COIN) fight. This required



Sergeant Major of the Army Michael Grinston speaks to a board of noncommissioned officers preparing for the best warrior competition Oct. 11, 2019. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Army Twitter)

us to be adaptive and find a better way to lead Soldiers in order to meet the commander's intent and achieve the mission requirements. mission command empowered junior leaders.

So how do you approach this topic in your unit? The mission command philosophy and warfighting function must be continually studied. This can be done by conducting NCO professional development (NCOPD), staff rides, and mentoring. NCOPDs that discuss Army doctrine and define mission command is a good start. The effects of which can be expounded by integrating leadership scenarios and experiences. These can take the form

of staff rides which are great leadership tools that allow leaders to learn from past battles, leaders, and situations. As with all of our Army doctrine, it takes leaders who require self-development in their subordinates, who tie new doctrinal principles to their organizational events, who take every opportunity to educate and develop their subordinates and who role model these principles.

If you would like to learn more about mission command go to *Army Doctrinal Publication 6-0*, *Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 6-0*, and *Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 3-07*. ■



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