



U.S. Army paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division parachute from a C-17 Globemaster during Joint Operational Access Exercise 13-03 at Camp Mackall, N.C., on 26 June 2013.

Photo by A1C Cory D. Payne, USAF

OPERATIONALIZING THE MISSION COMMAND NETWORK FOR JOINT FORCIBLE ENTRY OPERATIONS

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In late June 2013, the 82nd Airborne Division conducted its quarterly Joint Operational Access Exercise (JOAX) 13-03 to train for its Global Response Force (GRF) mission and move forward in resetting the division's GRF readiness cycle after 12 years of combat deployments. The weeklong exercise commenced with a no-notice alert to deploy with a full operation orders process and then transitioned to outload/final manifest procedures, a simulated long flight that included in-flight parachute rigging, and en-route communications establishment with rear and adjacent units. The exercise culminated with an airborne joint forcible entry by the 82nd Airborne Division's tactical headquarters node and a reinforced airborne brigade combat team to seize airfields, evacuate U.S. and allied citizens, and secure chemical weapons and critical infrastructure.

JOAX 13-03 was the largest airborne joint forcible entry exercise held since combat operations began in Afghanistan and Iraq. The exercise involved approximately 6,800 Soldiers working closely with elements of six air wings from the U.S. Air Force's Air Mobility Command and U.S. Air Force Reserve Command to conduct 24 airborne operations.¹ A joint exercise of this scale and complexity occurs only through willing

teamwork among joint commanders who have the mandate to train and maintain an airborne joint forcible entry capability for the nation's future contingencies. From this exercise, Army and Air Force leaders are continuing to learn that the ability to defeat known and anticipated anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) threats while gaining and maintaining opposed access requires adaptable, flexible leaders skilled at rapid decision making who can successfully integrate mission command across networks to achieve cross-domain dominance.

The preceding overview of JOAX 13-03 illustrates a critical piece of the foundation for mission command in forcible entry operations and by extension to all military endeavors: the network which provides a conduit for shared understanding must be operationalized in order to provide a relevant medium for the commander. The recent experience of leaders in the airborne task force which executed JOAX 13-03 provides several salient lessons for this enterprise. These instructive examples highlight the necessity to resource and train leaders in a demanding environment in order to integrate a network-enabled mission command approach across all warfighting functions and phases of the operation.

Forcible Entry as a Prelude to Sustained Operations

The current Defense Strategic Guidance clearly identifies the requirement to project power despite A2/AD challenges as a key component to credibly deter or defeat potential adversaries.² The Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) describes the military's unique capability to project power in the face of such armed opposition. This overarching concept is characterized by the twin efforts of overcoming A2/AD measures, thereby introducing combat power into a previously distant region of operations. Current joint doctrine casts cross-domain synergy as the underlying approach for operational access — the complementary combination of our own asymmetrical advantages inherent in the joint force. Within the JOAC, the act of forcible entry engenders purposeful action to project land forces into an adversary's territory, ostensibly to enable further operations.³

A joint forcible entry operation provides an excellent construct to stress the mission command systems in an organization. Personified by an opposed airfield seizure and the expansion of a lodgment, this form of warfare encompasses not only tactical actions but also operational art and the strategic context. Given the rebalancing strategic climate, an airborne joint forcible entry operation's potential of global reach can integrate unified land operations into any theater's joint campaign plan.⁴ This notion reflects the reality that some emerging models under the broad scope of JOAC such as Air-Sea Battle could be fundamentally insufficient to support that strategy since major military, political, and population objectives are too far inland to affect with a distant force lacking a sustained presence among the people.⁵ In establishing a defended lodgment, a joint forcible entry operation which seizes a viable airfield supports an operational approach which links tactical action to strategic aims by providing for a transition to sustained land operations.

Additionally, the forcible entry imparts operational shock to an adversary's system and fundamentally dislocates it in terms of both space and purpose. Operational shock reflects the notion that although it is impractical to destroy an adversary's combat power in its entirety through attrition, a force can attack the coherent unity of the adversary as a system.⁶ If recent experience indicates anything, it is that this dynamic transition to sustained operations is a requisite element of land warfare when compared to a myopic approach rooted in effects-based operations.⁷ Simply put, there is no substitute for unified land operations' central theme of seizing, gaining, and exploiting the initiative to gain and maintain a position of relative advantage; forcible entry is a significant means to that end.

The Utility of Mission Command

Mission command guides this critical activity by effectively countering the inherent uncertainty in operations.⁸ This is not simply because mission command is a doctrinally anointed model for guiding unified land operations; it reflects the advantage of purposefully adaptive organizations. As such,

it should appeal to doctrinaires and pragmatists alike.

Before delving into the operational details of mission command, it is beneficial to gain an appreciation for the command philosophy as a whole — an ecology of form, function, and logic. At each echelon, commanders establish a readily identifiable mission command system with physical components such as personnel, communications networks and information systems, equipment, and facilities. These complement the somewhat abstract qualities of personnel, processes, and procedures.⁹ The mutual trust and shared understanding between commanders described in the principles of mission command underscores the notion that an adaptive organization has a requisite amount of complexity inherent to its structure. One of the key precepts of complex adaptive system theory is that sources of order can emerge from any point. This is reflected in mission command since the command philosophy gives equal weight to several aspects of the system such as: the commander's guidance to subordinate units, the opportunity inherent in creating a shared understanding across the formation, and the power of bottom-up refinements engendered in the principle of mutual trust. This allows an organization to go beyond a direct adaptation, one that does not require a change in the way it fundamentally processes information. Through devices like a commander's guidance or collaborative efforts to understand the environment, an organization can change its entire schema and process information through an entirely new form of shared understanding.¹⁰

An airfield seizure such as the one executed as a part of JOAX 13-03 illustrates the cumulative effect of uncertainty inherent in a complex operation and the utility of an adaptive organization. The system employed by the airborne task force is truly complex, so the dizzying multitude of relationships provides for a great sensitivity to initial conditions.¹¹ As such, deliberate planning cannot faithfully predict the effects of the friction of warfare on the objective, only anticipate probable outcomes and prepare the force with guidance. Mission command distributes a complex environment's uncertainty across the formation, allowing commanders at multiple echelons to rapidly adapt within this framework of guidance and trust. Critically, it allows these commanders to address an issue with their unique understanding of local context.¹² Therefore, it is ideally suited to the airborne leader's cultural mindset of leading "little groups of Paratroopers" in a cluttered and confusing environment along the way to assembly areas and initial objectives. But the utility of mission command is not limited to the tactical actions on the objective. The effort to outload and maneuver an airborne armada from multiple intermediate staging bases is an equally complex venture, with similar cascading effects from inevitable delays and setbacks. In many instances, these can only be reconciled through distributed decision making and leaders at all levels balancing risk with opportunity. This notion underscores the importance of a conduit for mutual trust, disciplined initiative, and shared understanding. Without this conduit, there is little hope of changing the organization's schema and moving beyond episodic direct adaptation.

Operationalizing the Mission Command Network: Structure and Context

An operationalized network is the expression of this conduit. This is not an earth-shattering notion, nor do I seek to cast mission command as a revolutionary step in the art and science of command. Rather, it is a punctuated advance in the evolution of that art and science. Clausewitzian notions of overcoming the inherent friction and complexity in warfare were arguably only realized when an increasingly distributed battlefield was linked with modern communications and transport systems.¹³ Similarly, command philosophies such as *Auftragstaktik* were only viable options due to the emerging prevalence of radio communications. The current proliferation of dependable bandwidth, transmission, and sensor options provides the form and function for our networks which enable mission command. Beyond the metaphor of the network as a conduit, it has several specific roles: gaining understanding of the operational environment, enabling decisions through analysis, and coordinating efforts to achieve the commander's desired operational objectives.¹⁴ This underscores the necessity of an operationalized network instead of an inadequate repository of data with little value to a commander in a fluid operation. This is only realized when the command structure consists of a network of leaders linked by technology, driving toward mission accomplishment.¹⁵ With this emphasis on the importance of network-enabled mission command, planning at all echelons for JOAX 13-03 focused on a robust set of command posts and communications infrastructure.

The first aspect of the network that must be operationalized is the structure. In this regard, a forcible entry provides a unique set of challenges. In almost any contingency, it is realistic that a mission network will already be established. Metaphorically, the force must penetrate and extend this network to ensure access throughout the operation. Penetrating the network involves breaking through the firewalls (both digital and organizational) that normally partition separate networks. This provides the force with access to the existing mission network to support collaborative planning during the initial phase of marshalling and deploying the force. Extending the network is the means of broadening the conduit of information across the entirety of the force to promote a shared understanding and facilitate bottom-up refinements. As the forcible entry operation secures its objectives, the transition of the physical structure of the network becomes a critical event. The initial assault is characterized by an austere environment for mission command, which includes more rucksacks and analog tools than tailored facilities

and digital architecture. The transition to sustained operations can only begin as combat power builds in the lodgment and enhanced equipment is introduced, such as communications nodes, tent structures, and generators. Interim means such as vehicle-based mission communications systems must bridge the gap during this transition. In summary, the force must carefully plan these transitions. There must be a detailed plan to prioritize the Army Battle Command Systems (ABCS) integration on the drop zone and to increase bandwidth as assets become available to the commander. Thus, within this operationalized structure, the network must lend suitable context to the commander's ability to make decisions if it is to have any useful application and must be collaborative across echelons, organizations, and systems (i.e., U.S. Army Project Foundry and the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization and their specialized data systems/applications).

The Emerging Model for Mission Command in Joint Forcible Entry

Ultimately, a forcible entry requires this operationalized network to maximize the potential of mission command as the guiding command philosophy for operations. This endeavor is inherently difficult given the complex nature of a forcible entry in which the commander and his staff rapidly transition from home-station planning and preparation to a high-tempo combat operation. This requires a change in the way in which commanders and staffs visualize the network and a concurrent increase in two specific capabilities to enable the network.

First, commanders and staff must stop visualizing the established home-station network as an ideal and the austere aspects of a tactical network as a lesser counterpart. Since the theory and practice of mission command do not change between these modalities, neither should the network which



Photo by SSG Jason Hull

Paratroopers from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division establish their tactical headquarters at Camp Mackall, N.C., on 22 June 2013.

enables it. As a model, they must view the installation as a docking station and unify the components of both networks. Under this concept, the unit conducting a forcible entry operation must metaphorically “plug-in” to the network for planning and preparation, unplug to marshal and deploy, plug in en route to the objective, unplug to assault immediate objectives, and finally plug-in to secure the airhead line and expand the lodgment. The Installation as a Docking Station concept relies on both the ability to penetrate and extend the mission network as described above and assured access to the network when the operation is most fluid and therefore requires the most command decisions.

JOAX 13-03 identified two of those critical periods: the approach to the objective area and the tactical actions within the airhead line. To address the first critical period, en route communications should be improved with existing equipment in the military’s inventory or by leveraging off-the-shelf commercially available communications terminals. To enable the airborne commander’s ability to refine plans en route and ensure a shared understanding across his force, the joint force must invest in solutions such as the Joint Command and Control System (JC2S) and Fixed Install Satellite Antenna (FISA) on the air transport platforms which support joint forcible entry operations. This technology would allow the airborne commander to communicate across domains via secure airborne broadband and have the ability to seamlessly send and receive data (i.e., digital voice communications, high-definition video, and imagery) by means of beyond-line-of-sight, satellite communications.¹⁶

The second critical period is the transition to ground combat, during which most of the mission command network takes the form of analog battle-tracking over tactical radio nets. JOAX 13-03 tested the capabilities of a modified utility vehicle with satellite and FM communications and achieved notable digital and voice communications successes. However, this is only an interim solution developed by resourceful junior leaders seeking to fill a capability gap. A similar mobile system must be developed as an approved U.S. Army Acquisition Program and fielded to airborne and contingency ground forces.

To realize the benefits of the aforementioned initiatives, training for forcible entry operations must continue to progress from individual training to collective training across the joint force. An exercise such as the JOAX provides just that — an opportunity to conduct decisive action which is guided by mission command and enabled by an operationalized network. As such, the JOAX should mature to a fully accredited joint exercise in order to provide adequate resources for this critical operational capability. This becomes an increasingly critical enterprise as the military enters the next interwar period. Our history indicates that the militaries which use these interludes to prepare for the next unknown conflict successfully are the ones that can meld the fantastic with the feasible. This is a fleeting opportunity for the military’s force of choice for forcible entry to implement our matured command philosophy with the current and emerging inventory of network assets.

Notes

¹ Dennis Steele, “Global Response Readiness,” *Army* 63, no. 9 (September 2013): 22-28.

² *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012), 4-5.

³ *Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC)*, version 1.0 (U.S. DoD, 2012), 6, 16.

⁴ “Statement on Defense Strategic Guidance as Delivered by Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta,” 5 January 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1643>.

⁵ *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership*, 4; Richard Halloran, “AirSea Battle,” *Air Force Magazine* 93, no. 8 (August 2010): 44-48.

⁶ Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence* (London: Frank Cass Publishing, 1997), 16-17; Paul J. Blakesley, “Operational Shock and Complexity Theory” (master’s thesis, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2005), 68-69.

⁷ While the tenets of net-centric warfare (NCW) and effects-based operations (EBO) have long since been discarded from the contemporary doctrinal lexicon, a significant debate continues regarding the applicable tenets of NCW and EBO for contemporary approaches. See William Gregor, “Military Planning Systems and Stability Operations,” *PRISM* 1, no. 3 (June 2010): 99-111; Frederick W. Kagan, *Finding the Target: The Transformation of American Military Policy* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006), xv, 393-397.

⁸ Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2012), 2-1 – 2-3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-5.

¹⁰ Frans P.B. Osinga, *Science, Strategy, and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd* (London: Routledge, 2006), 90.

¹¹ Linda P. Beckerman, *The Non-Linear Dynamics of War* (Science Applications International Corporation), section 6.

¹² Antoine Bousquet, *The Scientific Way of War: Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2009), 90.

¹³ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 119-121, 139-140; Alan Beyerchen, “Clausewitz, Nonlinearity, and the Unpredictability of War,” *International Security* 17 (1992):73, 77; James J. Schneider, *Vulcan’s Anvil: The American Civil War and the Foundations of Operational Art* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 2004), 17, 33-35.

¹⁴ Charles A. Flynn, Wayne W. Grigsby, and Jeff Witsken, “The Network in Military Operations,” *Army* 62, no. 5 (May 2012): 32.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁶ Ben Iannotta, “Demand Grows for Broadband SATCOM Links to and From Aircraft,” *C4ISR & Networks*, Online Newsletter, 9 August 2013, <http://www.c4isrnet.com/print/article/M5/20130809/C4ISR/308090012/Demand-Grows-Broadband-SATCOM-Links-From-Aircraft>.

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