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TO WHAT EXTENT CAN DECENTRALIZATION OF  
AUTHORITY BE EFFECTED IN THE BATTLE GROUP ?

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PREFACE

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I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Col. Lindner, Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battle Group, 23d Infantry, 2d Division, and his staff for their assistance and cooperation in discussing at length their ideas and problems in the field of decentralization of authority.

The author has served for over five years in T.O. & E. infantry battalions and battle groups in positions varying from platoon leader and staff member to rifle company commander of units under the triangular organization and current R.O.C.I.D. organization.

The point of view expressed in this paper is that of the author - not necessarily that of the United States Army Infantry School or the United States Army.

  
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## INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the employment of nuclear weapons in warfare thirteen years ago, a new era of military concepts was born. The probability of a future major war being fought with tactical nuclear weapons employed throughout the battlefield is indisputable. Greater and greater emphasis has been placed on the necessity for dispersion both laterally and in depth in order to survive on the atomic battlefield, and on mobility and increased firepower of forces in order to ultimately gain victory over an enemy who will probably be superior in numbers. No longer will we have forces so closely grouped that time and space will allow commanders to reach the scene of critical action to decisively control and influence the results of an action. Individual initiative, especially on the part of junior leaders, will spell the difference of success or failure of the unit in future combat operations.

This monograph will study decentralization of authority within the battle group emphasizing two fields. The first field is the determination of how this decentralization will aid in the development of initiative and ability to act in the absence of orders among subordinate leaders. The second is the discussion of specific fields in which decentralization of authority can be best implemented in the current battle group.

The requirement for decentralization of authority exists at many echelons in the army today, and points brought out in this discussion will often be equally applicable to higher and lower echelons. However, the main concern in this study will be decentralization of authority from the battle group level to the company level.

Reference may be made to Annex A for a summary of the interview with Lt. Col. Hicks, Leadership Committee, The School Brigade, United States Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia.

## DISCUSSION

Decentralization of authority within the battle group in order to be successful, must develop leadership. "Authority is the legal powers vested to a commander by virtue of his rank and position". Successful command, however, is not based on authority alone. Command is a blending of authority and leadership. (6:1)

In the army today there is a need to "produce commanders who can meet the challenge of the atomic battlefield with speed, flexibility of mind, initiative, resourcefulness and the ability to act in the absence of specific orders". (19:31) In order to develop these needed traits now in our commanders, we must review certain basic factors that tend to discourage their development.

Too often there is a tendency on the part of higher commanders to place responsibility with a lower commander for a task, without giving him the necessary tool to accomplish that task -- authority. It must be recognized that "a commander cannot be held accountable for a greater obligation than the responsibility assigned and the authority delegated to him". (15:27) A commander cannot successfully accomplish a task when his authority to act has been circumscribed. A typical example would be holding a company commander responsible for his unit's range firing record, but at the same time dictating that all preliminary instruction and range firing will be centralized under a battle group committee of "experts". Here the company commander is being held responsible, but has little or no authority in establishing how his troops will be trained to accomplish the mission of successful completion of a range season. A commander, once given his mission and sufficient guidance so that his commander's desires are understood, should be allowed to analyze his problem and select the course of action that best ful-

fulfills his mission. If he is to be held responsible for his unit's performance he must be given the authority to train his men to perform the mission. Where responsibility has been delegated but authority has been retained, the commander becomes powerless to act. As Col. Kowalski indicates, "The commander accountable for the execution of a mission has the right to decide what is to be done and how he is to do it. High headquarters must refrain from interfering in details of operation . . . . Power cannot be delegated and retained by a superior". (15:29)

In the development of leadership the subordinate must be allowed to think and act for himself. "There is a tendency on the part of higher commanders to try to do everything for themselves. A field grade officer feels he must 'make a record' and brings about an injurious refusal to delegate authority to junior officers. This is especially true when he gets a command". (13:35) Tragically, this method of command can often be superficially successful in a peacetime garrison and training situation, but as Col. Hirman states: "Under these circumstances units may on the surface look good; however, morale is generally poor, and underneath there will be a malignant current of dissatisfaction, and under any real stress the unit will fall apart." (13:36)

Also to be considered is that at some time this commander will leave, and a unit run exclusively by one man who delegates no authority will suffer severely for some time after his departure. Subordinates who have not been able to use individual initiative to make decisions soon become conditioned to act only when directed to do so by a superior. It is noteworthy at this time to point out that the Womble Committee points to over-supervision as one of the factors doing most to drive capable officers and men out of the services and into private industry. (2:5) Also noteworthy is Lt. Col. Boatner's statement that "...oversupervisors fail to see that no military organization above the squad level can be run for long by one man - - no matter how brilliant or energetic. The oversupervisor shows his lack of intelligence by failing to grasp the vital importance of developing an organization." (2:4)

It is realized that junior officers need guidance, and will often seek it from a commander. However, guidance should not be so detailed so as to crush the individual's initiative in accomplishing an assigned mission. There should be enough flexibility in the guidance to allow a junior officer use of initiative in deciding how he can best accomplish his mission and when completed, allow him a feeling of achievement. Higher commanders must learn to judge results, and de-emphasize the stress on methods. Methods should be considered important only in that the desired results can be accomplished. "Too often, staff visits and surveys do not determine what has been accomplished, but how the job is being carried out." (15:28) This stress on results rather than methods becomes increasingly important in the light of future employment of the company in combat. It is envisioned that the company will be given a task type mission (Annex A) calling for independent action on the part of the company. In this type of employment a mission will be assigned, but the means of accomplishment will be left largely to the unit commander. If a junior commander is to be able to think and act decisively in combat under this type situation, he must be trained to analyze his best courses of action and react to accomplish his mission. Certainly there is no better time for this training than now, in the peacetime army. If we do not allow the subordinate commander to make decisions, ".the junior officer will soon discover that he has no real authority. Naturally, the course of least resistance for him is to sit back and wait for "the old man" to tell him what to do." (13:35) This attitude will spell disaster on the battlefield of the future.

"Decentralization requires an understanding that to err is human and that mistakes will be made." (15:29) In order to properly effect decentralization within his unit, a commander must accept the fact that junior leaders will often make mistakes; however, the merits of this system will far outweigh it's drawbacks. A lesson learned from a mistake on the part of junior leaders will be one long remembered and an error probably not made again. Certainly the time to make mistakes and

take corrective action ~~is~~during training when the only real cost is the immediate effectiveness of the unit. In the peacetime army we can learn from errors; in war the mistakes made through lack of experience may well cause disaster. Lt. Col. Boatner points out that "...the commander must be willing to sacrifice some measure of immediate efficiency in his organization for long range efficiency...We must acquire the courage to approve actions of our subordinates who, although not perfect, are good enough." (2:5)

This should not be interpreted to mean that incompetence or stupidity should be tolerated. Under increased decentralization incompetence and stupidity will come to light much more rapidly than under a centralized army where authority remains in the hands of relatively few. When personnel demonstrate inability to adapt rapidly to changing situations they should be quickly eliminated. It is noteworthy to point out that these unqualified individuals will come to light early and the resultant early elimination would be beneficial both to the individual and to the army. Col. Kowalski points out "...there can be no decentralization without confidence that associates and subordinates have the capacity to make sound and honest decisions...We must recapture our belief in the integrity of officers and be prepared to eliminate those who do not live up to the trust...The more confidence displayed, the more subordinates rise to the challenge." (15:28)

Turning to some specific areas where the principle of decentralization can best be implemented in the current peacetime army, by far the most outstanding field is that of training. It is this field that is the "guts" of the peacetime army and the area in which battlefield reactions of tomorrow will depend. Certainly guidance from the highest level must be adhered to so that the army is fully capable to accomplish its assigned mission. However, it often occurs as guidance comes down through the chain of command it is added to, specific functions and restrictions enacted, so that by the time the unit commander receives it, it is in the form of a directive allowing him little or no initiative to

act.

The unit commander is in the best position to know in which fields his unit is weak or strong and what steps are necessary to bring the unit up to acceptable standards. It is often found, however, that the unit commander does not make the training schedule for his unit. He has dictated to him what is to be taught, how many and what hours it is to be accomplished in, and even the method by which training is to be accomplished. A personal example of this type of centralization of authority was one in which the battle group S-3 prescribed the instructor for each company for each hour of instruction. I, as Company Commander, had to formally request, in writing, 72 hours in advance of a class to change instructors in my own company. Although this is extreme and unusual throughout the army, in units which I have served and those I have surveyed at Fort Benning it is not unusual to find that the company commander does not make his unit training schedule, but receives it from battle group headquarters. In this type of situation the commander has no authority to change the fixed and rigid schedule even though he may realize that his unit's capabilities may suffer. "In training closely controlled from topside, there is insistence of sticking to the formula. Subordinate leaders get little opportunity to use initiative." (3:32)

"Korea and its wide frontages pointed out the need for bold and reliable junior leaders . . . concern shifted from training of the unit to the quality of leadership." (14:32) Certainly the wide frontages of the Korean war will be small compared to those encountered on the atomic battlefield, and logically the quality of leadership will become increasingly important. It becomes more important, then, that training must point to the development of leadership at all levels within the battle group. The company commander, close to his junior officers, noncoms and men must be allowed the freedom of determining within guidance set down by higher headquarters how he will train his unit. He must have a mission, but he must be allowed freedom in accomplishing his mission. In accomplishing it properly he is developing as a commander himself, and

at the same time can closely develop the command capabilities of his subordinates.

Senior commanders must inspect training to assure that training is being conducted, and that under the methods used the results desired can be accomplished. Emphasis, however, must be removed from means of accomplishment and placed, instead, on the results accomplished. As Lt. Gen. Reuben Jenkins observes, "The atomic battlefield will have little opportunity for the commander to personally intervene. . . therefore, we must concentrate on the development of leadership." (14:23)

Centralization of training by implementation of the committee system, although most common in the training unit, is still in common use in the T.O.&E. units. Such areas as range firing, weapons training, engineer and specialized subjects often fall under the battle group committee type of instruction. The system admittedly standardizes the instruction given to all troops, centralizes responsibility of giving instruction away from the company and consolidates the use of facilities. However, normally little command interest in whether the troops "get the meat" of the subject results. The leaders from squad through company tend to pass the responsibility off as a battle group function - not their own. The result is that there is a lack of development of teamwork and feeling of responsibility within the subordinate units of the battle group. Would it not achieve more to have less "showy" instructions and concentrate more on developing teamwork and responsibility within the unit? The troops would benefit more from the individualized instruction of their junior leaders.

Brigadier General Crawford advocates doing away with the centralized committee system even in basic training units. He expresses the opinion that the junior leaders gain much needed experience, NCOs remain proficient in all infantry fields and trainees get more individual attention and, as a result, are better trained. (7:55) Certainly if this is true for training units the results would be magnified in T.O.& E organizations.

Field exercises and maneuvers must be stressed as a vehicle of training even more than in the past. It is under these simulated combat conditions that application of decentralization of authority can best be implemented. "Field exercises produce an ideal time for training and observation of leaders. The assigning of a mission and the assigning of authority to complete the mission must be stressed in this phase of training." (Annex A)

Commanders, during field training exercises, have an opportunity to stress decentralization. An assignment of task type missions in which independent action on the part of the subordinate commander is required will closely parallel the future combat employment of the unit, and will develop an organization capable of coping with the rigors of the atomic battlefield. Here, too, the commander has an ideal opportunity for observation of the real capabilities of his subordinate leaders. He can observe their abilities for independent action in the absence of orders, abilities to reach sound decisions and to continue to operate under adverse conditions. Surely under field conditions a commander can be given a valid test of his ability and right to command.

Within the field of administrative function, the R.O.C.I.D. organization has done much within certain fields to decentralize authority. The adoption of the present supply system is an excellent example of decentralization. At first glance it would appear to be a centralization of authority in that at the present time there is only one set of property books for the battle group, centralized under S-4 control, as compared to each company maintaining a set of books under the old supply system. In actuality, however, we have a centralization of the administrative burden and decentralization of responsibility with a resultant decentralization of authority in supply matter. The company commander now has command responsibility for the equipment within his organization while the platoon leaders are the accountable individuals, through the signing of hand receipts, to the battle group S-4. We now find the responsible agency decentralized down to a lower echelon, the echelon where the equip-

ment is actually put to use. The platoon leader, who normally exercises command authority over the personnel and equipment T.O.& E. to his platoon is now responsible for that equipment, not only for its proper employment but also for its condition and control.

It is felt by many that "the military ideal would be centralization of the administrative and service functions within the battle group...". (Annex A) Certainly at first glance the freeing of the commander of administrative responsibilities to concentrate on training is a sound idea. However, there is one field in particular that I feel that centralization of authority and responsibility should not be considered desirable. This field is the promotion and reduction of enlisted personnel centralized above the company level. "The authority to make a decision should be delegated to the commander nearest the point where the action is taking place." (15:29) Surely the company commander is closer to the action of the enlisted personnel of his command and is in an excellent position to determine who cannot carry responsibility equal to his rank, and those who are qualified to hold grades higher than currently held.

The argument advanced for the retaining of the power to reduce personnel above the grade of E-3 at battle group level appears valid at first glance. The theory that retaining the powers to reduce in the hands of the battle group commander prevents injustices occurring to personnel in certain units. A man who may be reduced for an offense in one company may not have been reduced for the same offense in another company if the battle group commander was not reduction authority. But using this same argument can it not be assumed that a man may be reduced in one battle group by the battle group commander for an offense or demonstrated inefficiency while in another battle group the same offense or demonstrated inefficiency does not warrant reduction?

A company commander is entrusted with the responsibility of training men for combat, yet under our present system he cannot reduce the undeserving or promote the deserving within the command he is held responsible for.

He must request that the battle group commander take action in these cases. This usually requires formal letters or requests for reduction, and as a result "...under the present system many commanders keep incompetent NCOs around because of the administrative difficulties of reduction." (4:54)

If we have trust in the competence and ability of our company commander the power to reduce and promote must be decentralized to come within his authority. Recognizing that mistakes will sometimes be made in reductions of personnel, the battle group commanders should be given the authority to rule in cases of appeal. It is interesting to note that in the old triangular division the battalion commander was the reducing authority and the regimental commander reviewed appeals. With the adoption of the R.O.C.I.D. division the battle group commander has become the reducing authority and the review of appeals is centralized at the division commander level. Decentralization of review of appeal to battle group level, and the authority to reduce to company level, should be considered vital.

In the field of promotions, often higher headquarters conducts tests and holds promotion boards to find those most qualified to be promoted. However, "...men who are best in the unit are not always the best on tests." (4:54) A written test cannot analyze the many intangible qualities necessary in a good noncommissioned officer, and often the result is a person less all around qualified will receive the battle group allocation for a promotion. The unit commander, through daily contact with an individual, is in a position to judge a soldier's ability to work in a higher grade better than a written test. A promotion board suffers from the same defects as written tests. A sharp appearing soldier who happens to be "boned up" in certain fields in which he will be questioned will receive a quota for promotion although other candidates may be more qualified. A board cannot determine from a few minutes contact with an individual what a commander can from months of constant close contact. A personal example of this took place while I served as a company commander

in the 1st Battle Group, 4th Infantry at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. In my organization was an outstanding sergeant first class and he was imminently qualified to be promoted to the grade of master sergeant. He was well decorated for heroism in World War II and in Korea. Before a promotion board, however, he tended to be visibly nervous and spoke with a rather thick Brooklyn accent. Although sharp in appearance, his nervousness and speech weighed heavily against him when he went before a board, and after several tries he was quite dejected about the situation. When it came time for another board, he requested that I send another representative from the company, rather than himself again. The alternate representative had excellent bearing, was well educated, and was a good, though not outstanding, NCO. He was selected by the board and promoted. True, he was a man deserving of promotion, but not as well qualified, in my personal opinion, as the first choice. Had I been given a promotion quota, I could have promoted the most qualified individual based on months of daily close contact and observation. I feel strongly that the powers of the commander have been usurped in favor of boards and written tests.

The final field of study to increase decentralization of authority and concurrently to decrease the administrative load of companies is the company commander relationship. A situation had developed with the adoption of the R.O.C.I.D. organization that finds the senior staff section members at battle group level majors, and the company commander remaining at captain. The result is that ".the weight of rank is simply going to bend the captain down," (18:61) in dealing with the staff. This feeling has been recognized by the army in the field as a problem to be dealt with. (Annex A) A commentary on R.O.C.I.D. Organization furnished by 7th Division units stresses the point, "There is a tendency on the part of the battle group staff to administer the rifle companies in the same manner as the old regimental staff administered the battalion, i.e., to require numerous written reports and records which are beyond the capabilities of the company commander to produce and maintain without an appropriate

staff." (5:2)

The administrative load has been increased on the company and the situation now often exists where "the commanders are in a squirrel cage. They cannot concentrate on a few well chosen objectives, because if they do they will find someone snipping at their heels to do something else." (17:28)

The staff has grown considerably in size with the current reorganization and administrative requirement of subordinate units increase with the size of the staff. It must be realized that the company will bend under the load of the increased administrative burden as staffs centralize portions of control and authority at battle group level and require administrative reports to be rendered.

Not only has the burden of administration been increased but it has been pointed out that "staffs order for the commander many things the commander knows nothing about." (8:31) The problem has long existed in the army structure, but has become a more acute problem with the present grade imbalance between the company commander and the battle group staff member. In the past, a commander was of equal rank with staff members (except for the S-3) and could argue long and loud on equal basis when he felt his rights as a commander were being encroached upon. Now he faces the problem of having senior rank cut short any such outbreak. "Typically there are too many staff officers making decisions, usurping command perogatives and interfering with subordinate leaders." (15:29)

The company commander must be rescued from this situation, which incidentally, is under consideration at present at the Department of the Army level. (Annex A) The battle group commander can do much by clearly delineating the limits of authority of his staff and encouraging the commander to command. But a more workable solution would probably be to additionally adjust the grade structure to return the company commander and battle group staff to approximately equal footing in the field of rank. Whether the company commander should be a major, or the staff should again be captains is unimportant in the sphere of authority; the important

fact is that the grade structure between the two must be brought into balance.

In studying the spheres where decentralization within the battle group can best be implemented, one glaring factor has become apparent to me. With the exception of the promotion and reduction field, regulations do not limit the decentralization of authority to lower echelons. Authority has centralized at higher headquarters because of the individual desires of a commander. Decentralization of authority must be accomplished by the desire of the commanders at all levels of the chain of command. It is a personal matter, a vital matter, and a problem that must be faced in the light of current army doctrine and world unrest, as possibly a commander's most important command decision and the best and most effective method of decentralizing authority.

## CONCLUSION

1. Decentralization of authority must be implemented within the battle group in order to develop the initiative and abilities of junior leaders.
2. Responsibility and authority are inseparable. One cannot be delegated without the other.
3. Training is the most important area from development of a unit and its leaders, and the area in which decentralization must be stressed.
4. The authority to promote and reduce enlisted personnel should be decentralized to the company commander.
5. The present grade imbalance between the company commander and battle group staff tends to keep authority centralized at battle group level. This imbalance also increases staff interference in command matters.
6. The means for decentralization of authority in most cases exists under current army regulations, and could be implemented at the commander's prerogative.

ANNEX A - (SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW WITH LT. COL. HICKS, LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE, THE SCHOOL BRIGADE, THE UNITED STATES ARMY INFANTRY SCHOOL, FORT BENNING, GEORGIA)

1. The characteristics of the battlefield of the future show a definite need for decentralization within the battle group. Units within the battle group will often be given task type assignments calling for independent action on the part of companies and platoons. The width and depth of the atomic battlefield will not lend itself to the personal control of the battlefield commander, thus requiring decentralization.

2. Stress in our training should be placed on results. De-emphasis on methods. The methods should not be overlooked completely; however, they should be inspected to insure that training is being conducted, and that the methods used are capable of producing the required results.

3. Field exercises and problems are extremely important and produce an ideal time for training and observation of leaders operating under decentralized conditions. The assigning of missions and the assigning of authority to complete these missions must be stressed in this phase of training.

4. The span of control in the battle group presents a problem to the commander of today's battle group and will require decentralization.

5. The ideal would be centralization of the administration and service within the battle group and decentralization within the spheres of training.

6. There is a recognized tendency on the part of staffs to administer companies. The battle group commander can do much to correct this situation within his unit.

7. The grade structure within the battle group with the staff and

company commanders is a recognized problem and one which is presently under consideration.

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