Doctrine: Our Professional Language and Observations from the Joint Readiness Training Center

by CPT Gary M. Klein

Most Soldiers have witnessed a civilian's puzzled face as he listens to a running dialogue of Army acronyms and terminology. Like most professions, the Army's language and operating concepts are quite specialized. On the surface, our language represents our unique franchise on violence, but at its depths, our operating concepts capture our professional expertise based on centuries of military theory. The Army captures its expert knowledge and theory in doctrine, thereby codifying a common language and standards all Soldiers and leaders should understand. One's foundational understanding of doctrine begins during initial military training, and it must continue throughout one's career in both operational and institutional assignments.

Doctrine is the foundation leaders use to efficiently and effectively plan and communicate. It embodies the shared language and understanding that enables Soldiers and leaders to easily move from one unit to another. Leaders modify the application of doctrine based on the mission variables of mission, enemy, terrain, troops available, time and civil considerations, but the unit that neglects its doctrinal foundation does so to its own detriment. A lack of doctrinal proficiency can manifest itself in inefficiency, miscommunication or even mission failure.

Observations from the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) indicate there are frequent challenges that could be overcome through a more thorough understanding of doctrine. Each rotational training unit (RTU) has distinct strengths and weaknesses, including varying levels of doctrinal proficiency. A few of the more frequent and significant doctrinal challenges RTUs struggle with include not understanding the primacy of purpose; misunderstanding the difference between a backbrief and a rehearsal; and misusing doctrinal terms, including those that have been rescinded, modified or are simply non-doctrinal.

In one instance, during a parallel-planning process between a brigade combat team (BCT) and its subordinate Cavalry squadron, the BCT assigned the squadron the task "screen" and purpose "to identify friendly avenues of approach." However, the assigned screen line was a significant distance from the brigade's objective, which limited the squadron's ability to observe and identify avenues of approach up to the objective. If the Cavalry squadron had conducted a "zone reconnaissance" or "route reconnaissance," it would have been able to accomplish its purpose fairly effectively, but it did not. Instead, the Cavalry squadron executed its assigned task to the detriment of its purpose.

This is only one example, but the scenario is all too common. Mission command requires leaders to have a shared understanding and to take disciplined initiative while achieving their missions. An increased emphasis on purpose and commander's intent helps leaders implement mission orders and fosters mission command.

Doctrine enables mission command

Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, **Mission Command,** defines the mission-command philosophy as "the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent. … *The exercise of mission command is based on mutual trust, shared understanding and purpose*."[1]

The emphasis has been added, but it highlights two prerequisites for mission command: mutual trust and shared understanding. Leaders must trust their fellow leaders to execute orders based on purpose and shared understanding. To understand purpose and gain the desired shared operational understanding, however, leaders need to develop a shared understanding of doctrine. This doctrinal foundation is the first step toward building trust and enabling mission command.

Leaders must be able to comfortably rely on their subordinates to accomplish their collective mission. This begins with the issuance of orders, continues while subordinates execute in a decentralized environment and includes reporting up and down the chain of command. Leaders use doctrine throughout this process as the descriptive and explanatory language through which they communicate.[2] If leaders do not have a common understanding of this language, they are likely to misunderstand each other or act based on false assumptions. In both cases, there is

potential for the erosion of trust. Leaders must emphasize doctrine in their leader-development and self-study programs to enable proficiency in our professional language, trust and mission command.

Figure 1. A commander's update brief takes place in the field during JRTC Rotation 15-03 in January 2015. *(Photo by CPT Gary M. Klein)*

Challenges in doctrinal concepts and terminology

RTUs wrestle with various challenges at JRTC, but one of the most detrimental is the struggle to conduct effective rehearsals. During decisive-action training rotations, the RTU begins in an intermediate staging base (ISB), where it conducts reception, staging, onward movement and integration (RSOI) before entering the operational area. Units typically conduct various combined-arms and support rehearsals during RSOI, including a rehearsal of its staging and departure from the ISB. Unfortunately, these rehearsals often devolve into a sterile backbrief on a terrain board instead of accurately reflecting the friction that a combined-arms rehearsal would reveal.[3]

Doctrinally, a backbrief is "a briefing by subordinates to the commander to review how subordinates intend to accomplish their mission," while a rehearsal is "a session in which a staff or unit practice expected actions to improve performance during execution."[4] When units backbrief their plans to move out of the ISB instead of rehearsing them, they fail to adequately understand their actions in relation to adjacent units, which results in units struggling to uncoil, failing to meet timelines and, ultimately, desynchronizing operations in the operational environment.

Units often struggle with select sustainment concepts and terminology as well. During their initial movement into the operational area, mounted units typically plan to conduct a refuel-on-the-move (ROM) to support their extended move from the ISB. A ROM helps the unit maintain its tempo and extend the time before it requires another Class III resupply.[5] This intent is favorable to that of the slower service-station method, but most units struggle to plan and execute the tasks required to accomplish a ROM.

Most units are not experienced at conducting a ROM, nor have they researched ROM operations to ensure they sufficiently plan to execute one. ***Concepts and Equipment of Petroleum Operations***, Field Manual (FM) 10-67-1, has an entire chapter that details the planning of a ROM. The doctrinal difference between a ROM and a standard service station is that a ROM delivers a predetermined amount of fuel (usually timed), along a dedicated refueling path where there are many refueling points to minimize the time the refueling march unit is stationary.[6] Depending on the size of the march unit conducting a ROM, this usually requires the supporting unit to have multiple fuelers; holding areas before and after the ROM site; and signal standard operating procedures for

controlling movement, etc. Alternately, supporting and supported units could swap fuel cans in a similar fashion, but units rarely plan these levels of detail into their resupply operations.

Another doctrinal challenge highlights the precision of terminology in the Field Artillery Branch. The effects of *disrupt*, *neutralize* or *destroy* have very specific implications for both the observer and the firing battery. If the forward observer does not correctly understand or communicate these effects, the firing battery might fire too many rounds, wasting ammunition. Conversely, the battery may not fire enough rounds to meet the commander's intent, which could result in disaster for a unit fixed by enemy fire.

These examples highlight the implications of our doctrinal knowledge, or lack thereof. Without a firm doctrinal foundation, leaders will struggle to efficiently and effectively rehearse, plan and communicate.

Figure 2. A field rehearsal in preparation for offensive operations during JRTC Rotation 14-08 in June 2013. *(Photo by CPT Gary M. Klein)*

Doctrine enables efficient and effective communications

Army doctrine is the language that its leaders – both noncommissioned and commissioned officers – use to plan and communicate efficiently and effectively. Consider the following situations, defined by the lack of doctrinal understanding. What if a platoon leader had to re-explain what the tactical mission task *support-by-fire* and purpose *fix* meant during every operations order? Or, what if the first sergeant had to re-explain what an ambulance exchange point, logistics resupply point and unit maintenance collection point were and why they were important for the company's mission? Leaders would have to spend significantly more time giving orders, explaining concepts and developing a shared understanding within their units if we did not have a foundation rooted in doctrine. Without doctrine, leaders would be significantly less efficient.

A common understanding of doctrine is required for concise, effective communication as well. If a commander orders his shaping operation to establish a support-by-fire position to enable the decisive operation's attack, then the shaping operation should not maneuver to seize and/or secure the objective. If it did, it is likely there would be synchronization problems. Soldiers and leaders can avoid these problems by having a thorough understanding of doctrine.

Rescinded, modified and non-doctrinal terms

Once leaders have learned doctrine, though, they must continue to stay abreast of changes because the Army continuously updates its doctrine. One of the most common updates is the addition of new terms or changes to

existing terminology. This creates the potential for leaders to use rescinded or modified terms as a product of habit, but as the Army adopts new terms and definitions, leaders must adapt to avoid potential confusion.

For example, the Army and intelligence community recognize the joint term *intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance* (ISR), but the Army has replaced its common joint usage with the term *information collection* (IC). The Army did this because ISR became overly associated with the technical aspects, whereas IC includes ground reconnaissance and the human element.[7] Some of these changes are relatively minor, but all leaders need to be using the same language to facilitate shared understanding.

Another commonly used rescinded term is *tactical operations center* (TOC), which the Army replaced with *main command post* (CP). This change took place before 2013, when the Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate (Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth, KS) created the doctrine-change historic database, so the reasoning is not recorded, but there are a couple of reasons that seem to make sense.[8] First, this change aligned the use of the term *CP* from *company CP* and higher headquarters all the way up the chain of command. Also, this change alleviated a potential misunderstanding where the acronyms *TOC* and *TAC* (tactical command post) sound very similar, especially over a radio.

Another bad habit is the use of slang in describing our operations. Slang is disadvantageous because it does not have the descriptive and explanatory details that doctrinal terms contain. Three common examples are *flex*, *take out* and *hit*. These terms' ambiguities are not effective at conveying intent, and they present an even bigger challenge to subordinate leaders who are trying to develop shared understanding. For example, when a leader orders his subordinate to "flex forces from Location A to Location B," this order omits many planning details. What are the priority routes? Is the unit expected to be able to avoid enemy contact, thereby enabling movement? Or, is enemy contact likely, in which case it should maneuver?

The other two terms, *take out* and *hit*, are equally ambiguous. When a leader tells his subordinate to execute one of these "tasks," do they know whether to disrupt, neutralize or destroy the enemy? Should they use direct or indirect fire?

These examples highlight a few of the challenges in dealing with non-doctrinal terms.

Figure 3. Screenshot of the Combined Arms Center's doctrine Website, http://usacac.army.mil/core-functions/doctrine. *(Retrieved April 2015)*

Where do we learn doctrine?

It is safe to assume that if leaders do not learn or maintain their proficiency in doctrine, they are more inclined to revert to rescinded, modified or non-doctrinal terms. Traditionally, leaders receive most of their exposure to doctrine from instructors during professional military education (PME) or from observers/coaches/trainers (O/C/Ts) at the Army's combat training centers (CTCs). As they progress, leaders will be re-immersed in and learn additional doctrine during subsequent schooling and CTC rotations. However, leaders must seek more opportunities to make the learning process continuous instead of episodic. Leaders should study doctrine and write professional articles within the self-development domain and discuss the art of its application as part of their operational unit's leader-development, self-study or professional-writing programs.

When researching doctrine, a good reference to start with is Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 1-02, **Terms and Military Symbols**. This manual serves as the Army's dictionary because it compiles the Army's unique and descriptive terms, symbols and language. ADRP 1-02 facilitates more study by referencing each term's proponent manual, where leaders can find additional details and context to expand their understanding of these terms. Collectively, the Army has many ADPs, ADRPs, FMs or Army techniques publications (ATPs), which constitute our doctrine.

Another excellent resource for keeping abreast of doctrine is the quarterly **Army Doctrine Update** and supporting **Doctrinal Term Quarterly Updates**, available from the Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate.[9] These quarterly updates summarize newly published doctrine and highlight changes in doctrinal terminology. While these newsletters are not systematically distributed to the force, leaders can easily share them with their units to foster professional and self-development. These updates are a quick and easy way for leaders to stay attuned to doctrine and doctrinal changes.

Conclusions

Leaders must use doctrine as the language to describe our operations and enable efficient and effective communications. Learning and staying up-to-date with doctrinal changes should not be the exclusive responsibility of PME instructors and O/C/Ts, nor be limited to when officers and noncommissioned officers attend PME classes. Leaders in the operational Army must tap into resources such as the quarterly doctrine updates; reinforce priority doctrine as part of leader professional development; and encourage self-development and writing to develop a more proficient and professional force. This renewed emphasis on building a doctrinal foundation will help the Army and its leaders establish a shared understanding, build trust and enable a mission-command climate.

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Notes

[1] Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, **Mission Command**, Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, May 2012, Page 1-2.

[2] MAJ Ryan T. Kranc, "Cavalry Organization and Task Terminology," **ARMOR**, March-June 2014, Page 10.

[3] Recommended tactics, techniques and procedures to help leaders conduct rehearsals: 1. Leaders should physically walk and stay on the terrain board. This allows leaders to visualize their adjacent units and synchronize actions in time and space. 2. Leaders should say their anticipated radio transmissions aloud during the rehearsal to practice triggers, expected actions and synchronization as it will unfold on the battlefield. 3. Leaders should designate a Red Team member to introduce enemy actions or contingencies into the rehearsal. These recommendations will help units rehearse their actions in the context of the overall scenario and improve their shared understanding. These recommendations are simply "a way." In the end, rehearsals should provide a venue to practice anticipated actions, enable leaders' shared understanding and challenge them to synchronize their efforts using the commander's intent.

[4] Department of the Army, ADRP 1-02, **Terms and Military Symbols**, Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, September 2013, Pages 1-5 and 1-49.

[5] Department of the Army, ATP 4-90, *Brigade Support Battalion*, Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, April 2014, Pages 1-4 and Appendix A.

[6] Department of the Army, FM 10-67-1, *Concepts and Equipment of Petroleum Operations*, Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, April 1998, Chapter 25.

[7] Carlos L. Soto, "Army Doctrine Terms Changes Historical Database v.48," Army Doctrinal Terminology and Symbology MilSuite Site, https://www.milsuite.mil/book/groups/army-marine-corps-terminology, March 9, 2015.

[8] The Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate maintains a copy of the Army doctrine-terms changes historical database at https://www.milsuite.mil/book/groups/army-marine-corps-terminology.

[9] For *Army Doctrine Updates*, go to https://combinedarmscenter.army.mil/orgs/mccoe/cadd/adpd/docupdate/Forms/AllItems.aspx, or follow the links from the Combined Arms Center's doctrine Website at http://usacac.army.mil/core-functions/doctrine. The doctrinal-term quarterly updates are usually linked in the doctrine updates but can be found on the following MilSuite site: https://www.milsuite.mil/book/groups/army-marine-corps-terminology.

Acronym Quick-Scan

ADP – Army doctrine publication
ADRP – Army doctrinal reference publication
ATP – Army techniques publication
BCT – brigade combat team
CP – command post
CTC – combat training center
FM – field manual
HHT – headquarters and headquarters troop
IC – information collection
ISB – intermediate staging base
ISR – intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
JRTC – Joint Readiness Training Center
O/C/T – observer/coach (or controller)/trainer
PME – professional military education
ROM – refuel-on-the-move
RSOI – reception, staging, onward movement and integration
RTU – rotational training unit
TOC – tactical operations center