# DO YOUR CP AND COMMAND PHILOSOPHY SUPPORT MISSION COMMAND?

**MAJ JAMES P. DEVLIN**

A company's ability to accomplish its assigned missions is directly related to command emphasis on reporting and communication. Higher-echelon commanders must regularly convey expectations in order to allow subordinate commanders the ability to execute disciplined initiative through mission command and their command posts (CPs). Success in the decisive action training environment (DATE) requires commanders to prepare and train their subordinates to employ the proper tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). More importantly, it requires that leaders at all echelons understand the construct of decisive action, unified land operations, and mission command, and how they vary from the counterinsurgency fight that has dominated our operations and training for the past decade.

## Unified Land Operations and Mission Command

Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Operations*, defines unified land operations as how the Army seizes, retains, and exploits the initiative to gain and maintain a position of relative advantage in sustained land operations through simultaneous offensive, defensive, and stability operations in order to prevent or deter conflict, prevail in war, and create the conditions for favorable conflict resolution. Unified land operations stress the art of mission command, which 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. The six principles of mission command are:[1]

- Build cohesive teams through mutual trust,
- Create a shared understanding,
- Provide a clear commander's intent,
- Exercise disciplined initiative,
- Use mission orders, and
- Accept prudent risk.



**U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to Multinational Battle Group-East's Forward Command Post call for a medical evacuation during air assault training in Gracanica, Kosovo, on 10 May 2017. (Photo by SPC Adeline Witherspoon)**

Companies and their CPs (as a system) must understand unified land operations and the principles of mission command. Additionally, there are three critical elements that a CP should track, monitor, and control — **tactical infrastructure**, **sustainment**, and **casualty care and evacuation**. It is irrelevant whether you are conducting a deliberate attack, area defense, or stability tasks — all of the critical elements remain constant and must be monitored by commanders and their CPs.

**Tactical infrastructure** refers to the equipment, facilities, and maintenance of units at the company and battalion levels. Tactical infrastructure is a crucial part of creating a shared understanding and operational framework for subordinates and subordinate units to operate. Platoons and companies may have varying levels of supply of water, food, fuel, ammunition, and parts on hand; understanding the status of these and their impact on current and planned operations is critical. A company operating as part of a brigade combat team during a DATE exercise is far different than a company occupying two or three fixed sites in Iraq or Afghanistan and being supported by routine combat logistic patrols, contracted services, large generators for power, and trash removal. There are, however, some important lessons learned from our recent deployments that must be remembered and directly apply to DATE, specifically concerning stability operations.

**Sustainment** is the provision of logistics, personnel services, and health service support necessary to maintain operations until successful mission completion. Successful sustainment enables freedom of action by increasing the number and quality of options available to the commander. Sustainment is essential for retaining and exploiting the initiative."[2] Sustainment has routinely been a friction point; it has also caused commanders to change their plans or fail. Within a battalion, organic assets are very limited. While the brigade can reinforce the capacity of a battalion, it should not be the first choice. Commanders and staffs need to critically think through the requirements and challenges of each operation. Since every unit will need to be capable of conducting offensive, defensive, and stability operations, staffs need to be able to forecast requirements that allow both battalion and company commanders to understand capabilities and limitations. This levels expectations and provides a framework for proper resource allocation.

**Casualty care and evacuation** — Casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) "involves the unregulated movement of casualties using predesignated or opportune tactical or logistic aircraft and vehicles."[3] CASEVAC and casualty treatment must be clearly defined, planned, articulated, and rehearsed at all levels. Long gone are the days of calling in a nine-line and getting immediate medical support for one or two casualties. The ability to drop everything and wait for medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) aircraft is outdated. Units should be able to fire, maneuver, and report while executing CASEVAC operations without reliance on MEDEVAC aircraft.

When a company sustains casualties, ideally, it continues and completes the mission. Once it has sufficient combat power and security, then casualties are collected and consolidated for movement. If possible, the company executes its primary mission while simultaneously executing CASEVAC. In a DATE, the company is responsible for taking the casualty from the point of injury to the battalion casualty collection point (CCP) — whether it is the forward aid station (FAS), main aid station (MAS), or battalion aid station (BAS). Each individual Soldier is responsible for conducting self-aid, providing buddy aid, and helping medics provide care as necessary. Generally, the first sergeant will control the CCP and lead the effort to stabilize and transport to the battalion. Once at the BAS, it becomes the battalion's responsibility to stabilize, triage, and transport the patient(s) to an ambulance exchange point (AXP). From there, it becomes the brigade's responsibility.

Company CPs are a tool that enable commanders to execute mission command. Tactical infrastructure, sustainment, and casualty care and evacuation are elements that have been linked to functioning CPs and mission command. Deploying to a Combat Training Center (CTC), such as the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Germany, puts an emphasis on the importance of command posts. For a BCT to be successful in a DATE, the CTC stresses the unit's ability to synchronize its CP with unified land operations and mission command.

**Observations of CPs at JMRC**

*"It was the sixth day of force on force and I was not sure why I joined the Army; I couldn't keep my eyes open and would kill for a shower and a good night of rest. Through all of this, somehow my equipment and my unit's equipment was still working; personnel were accounted for; chow, fuel, water, ammo kept showing up; and I hadn't seen my battalion commander in three days. How was this even possible? It was possible because my chain of command*

**Soldiers with the 173rd Airborne Brigade unload supplies while conducting a logistical resupply mission during exercise Saber Junction 16 in Hohenfels, Germany, on 17 April 2016. (Photo by SPC Nathaniel Nichols)**

*and I emphasized command post operations. If we didn't deliberately address command post operations before and during our DATE rotation, we would not have been able to maintain combat power, execute disciplined initiative, and/or destroy the OPFOR (opposing force)."*

**— CPT Kenneth Schmedlap**

The principle difference between average and above average units at JMRC is their ability to execute effective CP operations and enforce timely and accurate reporting. A critical tool is to establish and clearly define reporting requirements. The units at JMRC that execute successful DATE rotations establish reporting requirements and vigorously enforce them. This will focus a unit, provide clarity of purpose, and empower Soldiers. If the reporting requirements are important to the commander, they will be done. Battalion and company commanders need to educate their subordinate leaders on how the reporting requirements paint the picture (assist in visualization) for them and enable the staff to recommend courses of action that support the battalion's operations. For example, when conducting defensive operations, the battalion and company commanders developed nested reporting requirements that were tied to the steps of engagement area development. Developing those reporting requirements allowed the chain of command to identify potential issues and develop plans to mitigate those issues. This was particularly evident when units were reporting percentage of completion on obstacles. This allowed the commanders to spot check the obstacles to confirm or deny their intent was being met, which resulted in one of the few elements to successfully employ obstacles that helped defeat the enemy elements.

Another example of how reporting and CP operations enabled the company to synchronize and integrate operations is through the use of sustainment reporting. The company executive officer (XO) created a reporting timeline and criteria that was vigorously enforced. The company would then spot check the reports for accuracy by inspecting the subordinate elements. The commander, first sergeant (1SG), XO, and fire support officer (FSO) would rotate inspections daily to get a different perspective and validate "ground truth" for each platoon. By rotating inspecting personnel, the company was able to accurately track its combat power and maintain a high level of operational readiness. This unit's success would not have been possible if it did not understand what a company command post does and how it should operate.

**What is a Command Post?**

A CP is a unit headquarters where the commander and staff perform their activities.[4] Each CP performs specific functions by design as well as additional tasks the commander assigns. Common activities of the CP include: maintaining the common operational picture; controlling operations; assessing operations; developing and disseminating orders; coordinating with higher, lower, and adjacent units; and performing CP administration duties. While defined CP and associated tasks as previously listed are at the battalion and higher level, the CP at the company level does perform many of the same activities. The major reason for the difference is that the company does not have a staff; however, it does have personnel available to man the CP and assist in mission command.

**Manning of the Company CP and Associated Duties and Responsibilities**

Every company has the personnel, expertise, and equipment to execute CP operations. Lack of prioritization and manning directly impacts the preparedness and effectiveness of the company CP. CP personnel support commanders, assist subordinate units, and inform units and organizations outside the company headquarters. CP personnel operate the commander's mission command system by supporting the commander in performing those aforementioned tasks. The commander needs to give clear instructions on the roles and responsibilities of his headquarters and ensure that the platoons are capable of meeting their reporting requirements.

Below are some examples of duties and responsibilities of CP personnel:

**XO —** The XO is second in command and primarily assists the commander in mission planning and accomplishment.

The XO:
* Assumes command of the company as required;
* Ensures that tactical reports from the platoons are provided to the battalion tactical operations center (TOC);
*Locates where to maintain communications with the company commander and the battalion;
*  Along with the 1SG, plans and supervises the company's sustainment operations and ensures that pre-combat inspections (PCIs) are completed;
*Plans and coordinates logistical support with organizations outside the company while the 1SG does the same internally;



**Troopers assigned to the 3rd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, along with Soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade, evacuate a casualty during a joint force entry exercise at Hradcany Air Field, Czech Republic, on 29 April 2017. (Photo by SGT Devon Bistarkey)**

*Coordinates with higher, adjacent, and supporting units;
* May aid in control of critical events of the mission (such as  passing of lines, bridging a gap, or breaching an obstacle) or assume control of a platoon attached to the company during movement;
* May lead a quartering party, an element consisting of representatives of various company elements, to precede the company and reconnoiter, secure, and mark an assembly area.
* May lead a detachment with other tactical tasks such as shaping or sustaining force leader in a company raid or attack, control company machine guns, or a mortar section;
* May also lead the reserve, lead the detachment left in contact during a withdrawal, or control attachments to the company; and
* May serve as movement control officer or pickup zone (PZ)/landing zone (LZ) control officer.

**1SG** — The 1SG —  the senior NCO and normally the most experienced Soldier in the company — is the commander's primary tactical advisor and the expert on individual and NCO skills.

The 1SG:
* Helps the commander plan, coordinate, and supervise all activities that support the unit mission;
* Operates where the commander directs or where he/she can best influence a critical point or what is viewed as the unit's decisive point;
* Supervises routine operations (can include enforcing tactical standing operating procedures [TSOPs]; planning and coordinating both training and unified land operations; and administering replacement operations, logistics, maintenance, communications, field hygiene, and CASEVAC operations);
* Supervises, inspects, and influences matters designated by the commander as well as areas that depend on his expertise such as Soldier care, force protection, security, and accountability;
* Assists the XO and is prepared to assume the XO's duties if needed; and
* Leads task-organized elements or subunits for the company's shaping effort or other designated missions.

**Radio-Telephone Operator (RTO)** — The RTO is a crucial combat multiplier who is essential to facilitating communication for the platoon and company. Even though every Soldier should be capable of basic filling and manipulation of all issued communication equipment, the RTO's role is more in depth and complex.

The RTO:
* Coordinates with the higher unit for retrieving of proper communications security (COMSEC);
* Serves as the subject matter expert to provide unit-level training;
* Protects and accounts for COMSEC devices;
* Is the commander's recorder and note taker and is capable of moving with and responding for the commander on multiple nets; and
* Is responsible for briefing portions of paragraph 5 of the operation order (OPORD).

**FSO** — The company FSO integrates all fires to support the commander's scheme of maneuver. Although not the primary shooter for the company, the FSO must be an expert at locating targets and adjusting tires.

The FSO:
* Plans, coordinates, and executes fire support;
* Advises the maneuver commander on fire support matters;
* Keeps key personnel informed of pertinent information;
* Trains the fire support team (FIST) and forward observers (FOs) in applicable fire support matters;
* Requests, adjusts, and directs all types of fire support;
* Ensures that the fire support plan and/or fire support execution matrix is prepared and disseminated to key personnel;
* Allocates FOs and other observers to maintain surveillance of targets and named areas of interest; and
* Provides emergency control of close air support (CAS) missions in the absence of qualified Air Force personnel (air liaison officer [ALO], enlisted terminal attack controller [ETAC], and/or airborne forward air controller).

**FSO NCO** — The company fire support NCO is the senior enlisted assistant to the company FSO and acts as the company FSO in his absence.

The FSO NCO:
* Supervises and trains all enlisted section members on the maintenance and use of their equipment. He must also be able to perform all the duties of the FSO.

When the appropriate divisions of labor in the headquarters occur, it allows all functions of a CP to be accomplished. Once each person is clear on each other's responsibilities, then a unit can begin to operate efficiently. When personnel know what they are required to do, this reduces unnecessary duplication of effort and empowers subordinates to act decisively and take initiative within the commander's intent.

### Daily Reporting Requirements That Enable Mission Command

Building a foundation for your unit to operate is a big key to success. If we, as leaders, are unable to provide guidance and a daily framework, we will be engaging in things that someone else can manage. Daily reporting requirements and the use of SOPs are a great start to enabling mission command and disciplined initiative. It provides commanders the ability to observe their unit, receive appropriate information, and command accordingly. This allows subordinates to effectively and efficiently manage their elements' time.

### Training of the CP Prior to DATE Rotation

Training at home station is as simple as building a shell CP within your company area. That is the time to work on standardizing your SOPs. Field Manual (FM) 3-90.6, *The Brigade Combat Team*, states that all CPs have the responsibility to conduct the five basic functions of information management (IM):

- Collect relevant information;
- Process information from data to knowledge;
- Store relevant information for timely retrieval to support command and control;
- Display relevant information tailored for the needs of the user; and
- Disseminate relevant information.

All these principles can be exercised in the garrison environment and provide the framework for subordinates to report and execute, thus allowing the commander to be freed up to command.

To train and/or rehearse the principles of mission command, recommend developing and implementing standardized warning order (WARNO) and OPORD shells, an all-weather terrain model kit, and tracking boards. These tools, if regularly used and well rehearsed, create efficiencies and increase capacity so that the unit is less likely to be overwhelmed with the high operations tempo during DATE rotations.

When your unit executes a training exercise, it is imperative to work established systems in your CP. This can alleviate many issues that typically occur during a DATE rotation. These reporting and battle rhythm events should be SOPs that become ingrained in the subordinate leaders and the personnel staffing the CP. Validation exercises prior to CTC rotations are an effective means to practice these functions across multi-echelons and flatten the learning curve.

### How to Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Company CP

Metrics are an important tool to track and evaluate a subordinate unit's effectiveness in executing elements of mission command. The table on the last page is an example of metrics commanders have used as a forcing mechanism to implement the principles of mission command; this one was used by JMRC's Timberwolf Maneuver Observer-Coach-Trainer Team to evaluate platoons and companies. If units deliberately implement these metrics into their daily operations, units and their leaders will be able to understand their strengths and weaknesses. This allows the unit to identify issues and take appropriate actions.

Successful command posts operate to facilitate the commander's requirements. A Soldier trained to track platoons and keep the organization reporting and executing on schedule is a vital asset that provides clarity in a CP. The senior person in the CP can quickly receive information about personnel, equipment, classes of supply, the status of platoon OPORDs, rehearsals, and PCIs, to name just a few areas. That individual can then quickly relay necessary information to higher headquarters or the commander to enable him to focus efforts on the platoon that may require more leadership involvement. This system also provides the commander with the information required to

make decisions quickly upon returning to the CP. A well-trained RTO or Soldier running the CP can quickly brief the commander on all tasks because reports are received and information is updated and accurate. For example,the commander returns from a battalion briefing and is told the status of each platoon, all attachments, and any relevant commander's critical information requirements. The RTO then reads the level of completion for each battle position, all fuel levels, the time left for each engineer asset, the status of all logistic packages, etc. When all this happens automatically and the commander receives the required relevant information, the CP is operating as defined and intended, enabling mission command.

## Conclusion

In closing, a company's success is directly related to the degree its CP enables mission command. A unit's ability to understand multiple variables — especially CP operations, mission command and unified land operations — allows it to develop, train, rehearse, and enforce reporting requirements through the CP. A properly resourced and integrated CP allows for a smooth integration and facilitates mission command. Effective command posts are the key to successful DATE rotations.

## Notes

[1] ADRP 3-0, *Operations* (November 2016).
[2] Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 4-0, *Sustainment* (July 2012).
[3] Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 4-25.13, *Casualty Evacuation* (February 2013).
[4] ATTP 5-0.1, *Command and Staff Officer Guide* (September 2011).

**MAJ James P. Devlin** is a task force analyst at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Hohenfels, Germany. He has previously served as a task force planner and maneuver company observer-coach-trainer (OCT).

## Example Metric to Evaluate Platoons and Companies

| | Red | Amber | Green |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1) Pre-Combat Checks (PCCs)** | None conducted; did not inspect one or more of the areas required for amber rating; did not attempt to correct deficient areas. | Pre-fire checks conducted; individual and crew-served weapon test fires conducted; load plans inspected; camouflage applied; performed preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS); commo checks of all nets; graphics checked. | Progress or preparations tracked and reported to higher; deficiencies re-inspected; Soldier back briefs conducted. |
| **2) PCIs** | None conducted; did not inspect one or more of the areas required for amber rating; did not attempt to correct deficient areas. | Next echelon leadership conducts PCI then PCC; subordinate unit back briefs; inspection oriented on mission-specific areas; time available to correction deficiencies and make line of departure (LD). | Commander (CDR) issues criteria in OPORD; 1SG and CDR inspect different items across crews; NCOs expanded OPORD information by identifying implied tasks associated. |
| **3) WARNO** | None issued; did not identify timeline; did not specify tactical tasks to be accomplished; did not define area of operations (AO). | Subordinate units understand tactical task; special teams identified; timeline issued feasible and acceptable. | Subordinate leaders identify implied tasks; team-level rehearsals begin based on information; subordinate leaders generate additional options for leadership. |
| **4) OPORD** | No orders issued. Failure to develop any paragraph or to restate essential tasks or purpose. | Maximizes available time thru use of WARNOs and fragmentary orders (FRAGOs). Five-paragraph order developed through analysis of higher order. Assigned task and purpose to subordinate elements. | Analysis of implied tasks addresses further development of branches and sequels. |
| **5) Map and Graphics** | Not done. No refinement of graphics. No dissemination or briefings of situation template (SITEMP) and/or graphics not issued to all subordinate elements or attachments down to squad/vehicle level. | Graphics support task and purpose; scheme of maneuver and scheme of fires disseminated to all leaders and attachments. | Graphics support branches and sequels; issues a refined SITEMP; issues a refined decision support template (DST); disseminates consolidated graphics. |
| **6) Direct Fire Control Measure (DFCM) Use and Effectiveness** | None identified; did not prevent fratricide. | Coordination measure to deconflict elements; echelon of fires is feasible; use enables cross-talk; objective is clearly understood and well developed. | DFCMs are refined and validated during execution; target reference points (TRPs) identified are easily understood across the formation; threat vs terrain method analyzed and appropriate method selected. |
| **7) Rehearsals** | None conducted; did not inspect one or more of the areas required for amber rating. | Reinforces CDR's and subordinate units' task and purpose, scheme of maneuver, scheme of fires, scheme of support; integrated actions of subordinate elements throughout operations; identified the enemy's most likely and most dangerous courses of action (COAs); compositions, dispositions and strength; visually depicts graphics, terrain, enemy and friendly forces during rehearsals; uses appropriate type and technique given available time and resources. | Discusses higher intent, scheme of maneuver, fires, and combat service support (CSS); addresses branch plans and contingencies; addresses the seven forms of contact; incorporates attached operational control (OPCON) units into rehearsals; subordinate units conduct generic, mission-oriented rehearsals, and conduct separate CSS and/or fire-support rehearsals. |
| **8) Risk Management** | Not conducted (alert chain of command); risk identified but no reduction by control measures nor any supervision. | Uses an effective SOP or conducts a formal risk assessment. | Continues to refine or regularly update risk level by FM or voice; tracks risk level in company/troop/battery/platoon CP; identifies risk-accidental and tactical and conducts an internal evaluation risk review and mission execution. |
| **9) Escalation of Force (EOF) and Rules of Engagement (ROE) Violations** | Violation occurs; ROE not disseminated; no EOF is established. | EOF/ROE defined and understood; all resources identified in the plan are on hand; standard is known at the lowest level. | Subordinate units expand TTPs to ensure EOF/ROE is accomplished; no issues occur during tactical execution. |
| **10) Casualty Care and Evacuation** | No plan for MEDEVAC or CASEVAC exists; "by SOP" is not adapted to METT-TC (mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations); DOW (died of wounds) occurs during execution. | CL VIII on hand; point of injury (POI) care is accomplished; CCPs are identified in the OPORD; plan accounts for MEDEVAC and CASEVAC through ROLE II. | Gaps in capabilities are identified and coordinated for through higher headquarters; transition from MEDEVAC to CASEVAC option is seamless; replacements arrive timely due to company process being effective and efficient. |
| **11) Effective Reporting** | No situational awareness exists within the formation; battle damage assessment (BDA) not accurate; loss of communications for greater than 30 minutes with higher and/or adjacent units. | Timely and accurate reports sent to higher; situational understanding is accomplished at the higher headquarters; formation sustains tempo while maintaining situational awareness. | Recommendations generate additional options to the commander; additional resources applied to the fight based on accurate reporting; PACE (primary, alternate, contingency, emergency) accounted for redundancy and no loss of communications. |
| **12) Boresight** | Not completed every 24 hours | Completed every 24 hours to < minimum max weapons systems ranges. | Completed twice per 24-hour period at max weapons systems ranges. |
| **13) Time Management** | Subordinates given less than two-thirds of available time from the end of the OPORD and back briefs. WARNO issued but not complete or timely. | Subordinates given two-thirds of available time from the end of the confirmation brief; WARNO issued in a timely manner to alert subordinates of future operations; companies and platoons conduct generic rehearsals, PCC/PCI and logistics resupply based on the type of mission prior to receiving OPORD. | Subordinates given two-thirds of available time from the end of the confirmation brief; WARNOs issued that allow detailed parallel planning in subordinate units; the commander/staff assessing useful time as the amount of daylight. |