"There is at least one thing worse than fighting with allies — and that is to fight without them."
— Sir Winston S. Churchill

Today’s operational environment is dynamic and complex. Potential adversaries are capable of interconnecting multiple dimensions of warfare simultaneously, including cyber and information, conventional and unconventional, and regular and irregular. Nobody can counter these alone. As one surveys the different theaters of operation, it is apparent that a combined approach is essential. We’ve seen this recently in conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, and it has been an enduring requirement in the European theater. To prevail against these threats, forces must be able to integrate into a multinational force capable of operating across the range of military operations and do so at every level of command. More importantly, they have to be able to do it quickly — there must be a unified speed of recognition (of the threat), speed of decision, and speed of assembly, an ethos LTG Ben Hodges, commander of U.S. Army Europe, has described as “fight tonight.”

In order to fight tonight, multinational forces must have a common purpose and vision unified through the exercise of mission command. Due to its central European location and its geographical proximity to likely coalition and alliance partners, the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Hohenfels, Germany, is uniquely suited to train and reinforce these multinational mission command principles. This article discusses the importance of the mission command philosophy within a multinational task force environment and demonstrates some best practices to reinforce and generate functional multinational mission command.

Mission Command Philosophy

Exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.

Guided by the principles of:

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

The principles of mission command assist commanders and staff in blending the art of command with the science of control.

Figure 1 — Principles of Mission Command

In organic units, it is still challenging to have mission command permeate an organization. The best commanders foster disciplined individual and group initiative throughout their careers. They are approachable, take the time to know their subordinate leaders, give clear and concise commander’s intent, ensure a common understanding through collaborative dialogue, encourage disciplined initiative, and underwrite risk. Throughout, they build trust and mutual confidence. This leads to great units and great accomplishments, no matter what the mission. But imagine leading a multinational task force composed of 10 or more different countries — what’s your approach? Can you achieve the same level of trust, or are you doomed to failure?

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) foundational doctrine for planning, execution, and support of allied joint operations — Allied Joint Publication (AJP) 01 (D) — acknowledges commanders’ responsibilities to enable freedom of action, initiative, and decision making. But it also acknowledges the differences in mission command style among the different services and nations and therefore defines the following mission command prerequisites necessary for multinational formations:

- “Commanders and staffs should concern themselves..."
primarily with joint operational matters, taking account of component issues only as necessary. (Unified and fully integrated and interoperable command)

- The subordinate commander must understand fully the operational commander's intentions and what he is required to achieve, and be free to exercise initiatives based on that understanding, within a minimal level of control imposed from the higher level of command. (Decentralized control)

- There should be an active involvement in the doctrine development process by the nations and a common understanding of the operational doctrine governing the employment of forces. The latter is achieved through education, training, and exercises. (Education, training, and exercises)

- Trust (total confidence in the integrity, ability, and good character of another) is one of the most important ingredients in building strong teams. Trust expands the commander's options and enhances flexibility, agility, and the freedom to take the initiative when conditions warrant. Trust is based on the mutual confidence that results from the demonstrated competence of each member of the team. The opportunity to observe each member's capabilities in training builds trust and confidence in a Joint Force.  

This last principle — trust — is probably the most important as it drives and enables the other three. As GEN Dwight D. Eisenhower once observed, "mutual confidence [is the] one basic thing that will make allied commands work."  

Training Multinational Mission Command

JMRC trains and reinforces these principles using a variety of different types of exercises, each with a different purpose (but always multinational, theater-specific) and with an emphasis on interoperability. During a recent rotation, COL Phil Brooks, commander of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, pointed out, "JMRC provided the RAF [Regionally Aligned Force] an opportunity to work with multinational allies in a complex environment each day." It does so by immersing (task-organized) multinational units into realistic, high-intensity, demanding training environments against a world class opposing force (OPFOR) capable of replicating real-world challenges. The result is a fully trained and interoperable coalition capable of not only countering threats but defeating them soundly.

Some exercises are focused on our enhanced forward presence (eFP) partners in the Baltics; others may be focused on multinational airborne units that are their nations’ crisis response forces, U.S. Army Europe’s rotational armor brigade combat team (ABCT) with NATO high response ground forces, or assigned and rotational U.S. forces. Regardless of the construct, all exercises are necessarily multinational because of the operational reality — that is how we’ll fight should a crisis arise. Further, they are designed to reflect what might actually occur in a European contingency operation, including the pairing of most-likely partner forces into a multinational task force. Because every exercise is composed of different nations, with distinct capabilities, expertise, national interests, etc., no two exercises are ever the same. Therefore, each exercise will be designed with different considerations in mind. Because they can become quite nuanced in their complexity, JMRC multinational exercise design relies on a Joint Exercise Life Cycle (JELC).

JELC

The JELC provides the framework for every exercise. Fundamentally, it is a 440-day operations process with heavy emphasis on Army Design Methodology wherein JMRC and participating partner nation leadership drive conceptual and detailed planning necessary to execute a complex multinational capstone exercise. The cycle itself is a milestone-based process but remains adaptive given the dynamic nature of the theater. It culminates in producing a world-class, demanding rotational exercise in a training environment that replicates the theater.

Success in this challenging environment begins with the multinational task force commander and the overall ability of the organization to achieve mission command. The JELC provides a platform for the commander to build his team and establish meaningful personal relationships with his staff and his subordinate commanders and their respective staffs. A popular refrain among senior leaders acknowledges, "[w]hen faced with a difficult problem, it’s best to put five friends in the room. They’ve got trust and will assume risk. If you want to fail, put together five strangers." By design, the JELC seeks to develop the camaraderie necessary to succeed.

During the JELC, planners and staffs routinely meet one another at the variety of planning conferences and start building the team and the operational environment from the bottom up. Ideally, the multinational task force commander starts dialogues with the subordinate unit commanders as the JELC cycle matures. Shortly before the final planning conference, JMRC facilitates a conditions check during which

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Figure 2 — Sample Multinational Task Organization

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the brigade and battalion commanders in the multinational task force brief the U.S. Army Europe deputy commanding general. They brief their training objectives, training path, an assessment of their units’ abilities to execute mission essential tasks, and any issues or concerns. This helps to provide a common visualization of the conduct of the rotation and level of preparedness.

**Joint and Combined Academics Program**

During the JELC, leadership and observer-coach-trainers (OCTs) facilitate a week-long unit development session, known as the Joint and Combined Academics Program (JCAP). It is purposely tailor able and scalable to the exercise and the units’ training objectives. During JCAP, the OCTs review trends and lessons learned; facilitate detailed back briefs from all units on their capabilities; teach classes targeted to the units’ requirements and specific to the rotation; facilitate working groups and planning rehearsals; issue a detailed warning order that drives initial planning and a deployment order that drives reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI); and most importantly, they include team building and commander visualization events to drive confidence building. Throughout JCAP, the OCTs reinforce the importance of interoperability across the human, procedural, and technical domains and share best practices.

Ideally, representatives from all exercise partners participate in the JCAP. As mentioned above, facilitators issue a warning order to the training unit during JCAP, thereby allowing units the ability to conduct mission analysis on the various/multiple capabilities of the multinational formation. Often, they will do this through a unit capabilities brief. In this regard, JCAP provides an opportunity to build commander understanding and visualization and staff situational understanding. Further, it begins the process of earning trust among partners who will soon be task organized in order to counter the threat defined in JMRC’s signature Decisive Action Training Environment-Europe (DATE-E).

**Replicating the Threat — DATE-E**

Units are organized to support operations under the rubric of DATE-E, which is built upon the same foundation as the familiar Atropian/Arianian-based DATE 2.2 scenario. However, it is aligned/nested with the strategic NATO Skolkan exercise scenario so that it fits within the broader NATO context of operations. It is built upon the NATO Article 5 principle of collective defense — an attack against one NATO member is an attack against all.

The fictitious Skolkan scenario occurs in Europe, where forces end up in conflict against a near-peer competitor and hybrid threats in an operating environment that replicates tremendous complexity across a range of military operations and all aspects of PMESII-PT (physical, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure - physical environment, time). Colonel Mindaugas Steponavicius, commander of the Lithuanian Iron Wolf Brigade, called the combat environment “intense and most importantly — realistic.”

Finally, the DATE-E scenario incorporates enduring and emerging doctrine, including tactics, techniques, and procedures seen recently in the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict. For example, JMRC replicates multi-layered enemy...
intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (ISR); well- 
synchronized and overpowering fires capabilities; increased 
use of electronic and cyber warfare; and enemy “gray zone” 
activities — those actions below the level of conventional 
warfare but still offensive in nature.

Replicating the Joint Task Force, Adjacent Units, 
and Unified Action Partners (UAPs)

Multinational task forces rarely — if ever — operate in 
autonomous environments. They most often work for a higher 
headquarters and likely in coordination with adjacent units and 
unified action partners. While the task force commander is the 
primary driver of mission command within his unit, he is also a 
participant in his higher commander’s efforts — it is unavoidably 
a 360-degree effort throughout. As AJP 1-0 (D) recognizes:

“All military planning should be coherent with other non-
military and potentially multinational and non-governmental 
initiatives intended to stabilise and create a self-sustaining 
secure environment. A NATO military response must 
therefore be integrated into a wider overall framework or a 
comprehensive approach. In taking these and other security 
factors into account, there is no fundamental difference in 
the planning and execution of any operation across the full 
range of NATO’s military capabilities.”

This reality is replicated at JMRC through a blended 
training environment that includes live, constructive, and 
virtual components. There is always a higher headquarters 
as the higher control (HICON) that represents a NATO 
Rapid Deployment Corps Headquarters. In some cases, that 
headquarters is a real division or corps-level joint task force, 
such as the Rapid Reaction Corps – France. During most 
rotations, there is also at least one live, multinational brigade 
headquarters in a command post exercise, serving as an 
adjacent or forward unit. This allows for realistic command 
and staff coordination events with higher and adjacent units, 
including back briefs, updates, command visits to the unit in 
the field, etc. The unit in the “box” fighting force-on-force is able 
to leverage the effects of the HICON, primarily with respect to 
intelligence fusion, targeting, and effects on the virtual deep 
fight. Similarly, how well a unit screening in front of an adjacent 
unit operates can affect the unit in the box.

JMRC incorporates these units in a way that presents the 
multinational task force commander and staff with a more 
complete and holistic multinational operating environment. 
This is all done through a blended training environment of 
live, constructive, and virtual effects so the HICON deep fight 
in simulation is as real to the brigade as the fight against 
the live OPFOR. Further, JMRC populates up to five cities 
with 150 (contracted) civilians on the battlefield. As a result, 
the commander does not just “see himself” from an internal 
perspective but also within the larger context. He must 
inform those other echelons in a way that builds a common 
visualization, mutual confidence, and disciplined initiative within 
his stated intent. In short, he must execute mission command.

Finally, the scenario fully integrates an array of UAPs, 
including actual interagency members, government officials, 
nongovernmental and international organizations, and police. 

It also includes media and a replicated internet with Twitter and 
multiple news media websites. All of these resources provide 
substantial depth to the operational environment. UAPs support 
the unit’s overall situational understanding and are absolutely 
fundamental in supporting a number of tasks, especially stability 
tasks early in the operation.

RSOI

Upon arrival at JMRC, units are immersed in activities to 
replicate RSOI tasks (NATO: RSOM - reception, staging and 
forward movement). The Albertshof cantonment area replicates 
a tactical assembly area (TAA) wherein units plan, build 
combat power, confirm capabilities, back brief the HICON on 
progress and issues, draw classes of supply, validate mission 
command and fires systems, review procedures, plan, and 
rehearse. Units also designate and embed liaison teams 
and associated equipment in higher and subordinate units. 
Most often, these liaison teams act in an “advise and assist” 
capacity rather than just observing and reporting. Depending 
on the situation and capabilities, units may also embed small 
teams with operational, fires, and intelligence expertise; Joint 
Capabilities Release (JCR) systems; One System Remote 
Video Terminals (OSRVT); and full digital command post nodes 
(CPN) internet protocols.

To the extent it has not already been accomplished prior to 
arrival, RSOI provides multinational units the opportunity to 
determine specifics of their consolidated capabilities, national 
authorities, and policies. Often, units take the time to execute a 
static display of weapons and capabilities (“petting zoo”) where 
they co-locate critical assets to demonstrate capabilities. This 
serves the further purpose of overall situational understanding 
among the members of the coalition, which in turn builds trust, 
prevents fratricide, etc. Units often realize that they have 
tremendous assets or capabilities that they had not previously 
fully appreciated. For example, during one recent rotation, 
a brigade task force task organized a Belgian intelligence, 
surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance (ISTAR) 
company as part of the task force reserve. Later, the brigade 
discovered that the Belgian company had significant technical 
capabilities (such as cameras and digital/voice communication 
equipment) that were not being leveraged. Once discovered, the 
task force significantly adjusted the Belgian company’s 
mission and tasks to account for that capability. In another 
rotation, a brigade discovered that it had a Romanian platoon 
whose sole purpose was to lay and mark both persistent and 
non-persistent minefields. This freed up engineer and artillery 
assets and allowed for greater engagement area development.

The goal of RSOI at JMRC is not just to build combat power; 
it is also for commanders to develop better understanding so 
that they can visualize, describe, and direct their new formations 
accordingly and so that staffs build and maintain their own 
situational understanding. In turn, this will help to drive the 
operations process during the exercise.

The Operations Process

As discussed throughout, units use planning activities to 
built situational understanding. They optimize the steps of their 
respective operational planning processes (such as the military
decision-making process, the British Army Combat Estimate, the NATO Operational Level Planning Process, etc.) in order to resolve the challenges associated with multinational interoperability.13

Most of the characteristics of a multinational operational planning process are similar to any other national/organic operational planning process. However, during multinational operations, the planning process must be more deliberate. A multinational task force’s complexity is significantly more nuanced due to language, culture, law, national policy, etc. As the primary participant in — and the driving force of — the operations process, commanders must first recognize these nuances in order to gain complete situational understanding of the operational environment. The brigade commander requires more robust confirmation briefs from subordinate commanders that include not just higher and subordinate units’ respective tasks and purposes but also matters regarding capabilities, resources, etc. As a result, before subordinate units publish orders, the multinational commander convenes a course of action back brief to ensure all are operating within his intent and appropriately coordinated with adjacent units.

Another distinguishing characteristic of the multinational operations process is the incredible importance of rehearsals. During rehearsals, commanders and key staff continue to reinforce a common situational understanding to ensure a common approach to the operation. Commanders and their respective staffs focus on identifying and fixing issues rather than following a set script. Afterwards, commanders huddle to discuss final adjustments.

The task force commander and key staff then visit subordinate units to build and reinforce a collaborative approach. Throughout the fight, the battle rhythm and routine — combined with focused commanders’ updates and conference calls — further reinforce unity of effort. When mission command is a focus and executed comprehensively, the results are astounding.

Interoperability

Interoperability among nations and across the human, procedural, and technical domains is heavily emphasized in the European theater and a priority for NATO. In response to Russian aggression in Crimea, NATO agreed at the Warsaw Summit to an eFP of four multinational battalion battle groups, composed of forces from 16 different countries, in the Baltic States and Poland.14 The post-summit communiqué further stated, "Interoperability of our armed forces is fundamental to our success and an important added value of our alliance." Interoperability reinforces the "fight tonight" ethos and NATO’s credibility to reassure allies; it is also fundamental to deterrence. Interoperability also acknowledges that members of the coalition are reinforcing and complementary, if not necessarily the same in terms of doctrine, organization, etc.

Success in interoperability generally correlates directly to achieving functional mission command. Therefore, in every endeavor, training multinational mission command requires a strong emphasis on interoperability. According to AJP 01(D), “the effectiveness of Allied forces in peace, crisis or in conflict, depends on the ability of the forces provided to operate together coherently, effectively, and efficiently.” Interoperability necessarily includes three dimensions — human, procedural, and technical — and their importance in “the ability of a joint force to achieve its commander’s objectives.”16

To track progress, OCTs emphasize, monitor, and assess interoperability
efforts throughout the planning and execution of the rotation. A “scorecard” is updated daily, and the issues are discussed at every brigade and battalion after action review (AAR) so that any interoperability issues are identified and resolved.

Allied joint operations should be prepared for, planned, and conducted in a manner that makes the best use of the relative strengths and capabilities of the forces which members dedicate to an operation. Interoperability has three dimensions: technical (e.g., hardware, systems), procedural (e.g., doctrines, procedures), and human (e.g., language, terminology, and training) which are discussed briefly below.

Human — The human dimension centers on building relationships and includes the need to overcome language and cultural barriers. It’s also about the personal efforts to build mutual confidence. Building this dimension, especially trust and confidence among commanders, occurs from initiation of planning for the exercise through force-on-force execution in simulated combat.

Procedural — The procedural domain primarily revolves around ensuring key procedures (such as battle rhythm, clearance of fires, airspace coordination, etc.) are commonly understood. These will never be entirely common across formations, but those most critical to the fight need to be. JMRC is partnered with the NATO Standardization Office (NSO), which is the keeper on NATO standards, and the goal is to apply NATO Standardization Agreements (STANAGs) and other relevant NATO doctrine, such as Allied Land Command’s training and evaluation outlines (T&EOs), during rotations. These are reviewed and agreed to during the planning cycle and exercised during the force on force. Feedback is then provided to refine the doctrine.

Technical — Finally, there is a technical component to interoperability, the focus of which is normally on achieving secure FM communications, a digital common operating picture, and digital fires, especially via the Artillery Systems Cooperation Activity (ASCA) that allows the sharing of digital fires. This is perhaps the easiest of the dimensions for multinational units to address, as it deals with tangible, material items rather than the more ephemeral aspects of people and systems. However, that is not to say that operating in a degraded, or even analog, environment is not important. On the contrary, in those very likely situations given our adversaries’ capabilities, the unit must rely even more heavily on the trust and confidence gained in the human and procedural domains.

Conclusion

According to former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff GEN Martin Dempsey, there are three key attributes of mission command — understanding, intent, and trust. The three necessarily work in concert. In describing how important understanding is to mission command, GEN Dempsey references Carl von Clausewitz’ concept of “coup d’oeil” — the “inner eye” of the commander.

“When all is said and done, it really is the commander’s coup d’oeil, his ability to see things simply, to identify the whole business of war completely with himself, that is the essence of good generalship. Only if the mind works in this comprehensive fashion can it achieve the freedom it needs to dominate events and not be dominated by them.”

Developing this coup d’oeil is difficult, and doing so with multinational partners is even more difficult. GEN Dempsey states, “Leaders at every level must contribute to a common operating assessment of context, ‘co-creating it’ as operations progress and situations change.” We must continue to
build and refine our mutual understanding of operating as a multinational force as recent history suggests that this will continue to be the environment in which we fight. Developing this multinational understanding will enable clear and concise intent, which will in turn drive trust among multinational partners. The current and future operational environment dictates that success in war and peace requires allies. NATO’s eFP initiative serves as a timely and relevant example. The U.S. Army also is now fulfilling an enduring but rotational “heel-to-toe” requirement for an ABCT and combat aviation brigade in theater to enhance U.S. forward presence and speed their ability to get to the fight. Collectively, these forces will operate across many nations and would have to quickly aggregate and operate as seamlessly as possible.

Should conflict arise, units will fight as part of multinational commands; therefore, training and exercising as such is essential. Succeeding in that type of environment requires allies and partners building common understanding of the problems, common visualization of the mission, and the mutual confidence and trust to operate together and in a way that encourages disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent. JMRC is focused on this reality and therefore exclusively concentrated on training multinational mission command. Hopefully, after reading this article, you walk away with a greater appreciation for why and how units are being trained at JMRC as well as some practical tactics, techniques, and procedures for exercising mission command in a multinational environment.

Notes
6. Joint Publication 3-16, *Multinational Operations* (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 16 July 2013), I-3, quoting from General Dwight D. Eisenhower, circa 1948. See also, Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Farewell Address to the Nation” (17 January 1961), “Down the long lane of the history yet to be written America knows that this world of ours, ever growing smaller, must avoid becoming a community of dreadful fear and hate, and be, instead, a proud visualization of the mission, and the mutual confidence and trust to operate together and in a way that encourages disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent. JMRC is focused on this reality and therefore exclusively concentrated on training multinational mission command. Hopefully, after reading this article, you walk away with a greater appreciation for why and how units are being trained at JMRC as well as some practical tactics, techniques, and procedures for exercising mission command in a multinational environment.

Noteworthy:
- COL Curtis A. Buzzard currently serves as the commander of Operations Group, Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Germany. He served as commander of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, NC, during the brigade’s deployment to Iraq as part of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). His previous assignments include serving as the G3, operations officer, 82nd Airborne Division; commander of the 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), 3rd BCT, 82nd Airborne Division; Army Military Aide to the President, The White House; and a variety of other command and staff positions in the 82nd Airborne Division, The Old Guard, and 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. COL Buzzard earned a bachelor’s degree in economics from the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, NY; a master’s in military science from Marine Corps University; and a master’s in public administration from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.
- LTC Patrick L. Bryan currently serves as the deputy Staff Judge Advocate for the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and Fort Campbell, KY. He was formerly the senior legal observer-coach-trainer for the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, Hohenfels, Germany. His previous assignments also include serving as the group judge advocate for the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) at Fort Carson, CO; chief of military justice for the U.S. Army Training Center and Fort Jackson, SC; senior defense counsel, Bamberg, Germany; defense counsel, Grafenwoehr, Germany; chief, Affirmative Claims, U.S. Army Claims Service, Europe, Mannheim, Germany; command judge advocate for the Southern European Task Force; and battery fire direction officer, combat observation and lasing team (COLT) platoon leader, and battalion fire direction officer with the 2nd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, TX. LTC Bryan earned a bachelor’s degree in history from Texas A&M University; a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Oklahoma College of Law; and a Master of Laws (LLM) degree from the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General’s School.
- LTC Kevin C. Saatkamp currently serves as the JMRC organizational planner. He previously served as the senior brigade trainer at JMRC. His other past assignments include serving as a rifle platoon leader and company executive officer (XO) with the 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment at Fort Wainwright, AK; platoon trainer and battalion S1, 4th Ranger Training Battalion at Fort Benning, GA; battalion S4, AS3, and B Company commander, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry, 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division at Fort Lewis, WA; plans officer, U.S. Army Pacific, Fort Shafter, HI; battalion S3 and battalion XO, 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry; and brigade XO, 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA. LTC Saatkamp’s most recent assignment was as the chief - Contingency Command Post, U.S. Army Africa, Caserma Ederle - Vicenza, Italy. LTC Saatkamp graduated from USMA and has a Master of Military Art and Science degree from the Command and General Staff College.