

A few years back, a *Bundeswehr* team toured major United States Army training centers and gave a presentation on a command technique the Germans call *Auftragstaktik*. The team translated this word as "mission-type" or "mission-oriented" control, but this rendition is doubly unfortunate: It is neither accurate nor elegant, and it focuses the American and British soldier's eye straight onto Paragraph 2 of the operations order instead of on Subparagraphs 3a and 3b. I recently had both reason and opportunity to study this technique and I prefer to use another term for it: "directive control." This is easy to say and it conveys the full and precise meaning of *Auftragstaktik*.

I don't know how much effect the *Bundeswehr* presentation had at the time, but the theme is now highly topical. Directive control, in fact, appears to be the key to the effective implementation of maneuver theory as explained in *Field Manual 100-5, Operations*. I know of no other command technique that offers the speed and precision of response to match the tempo of the maneuver warfare of the future.

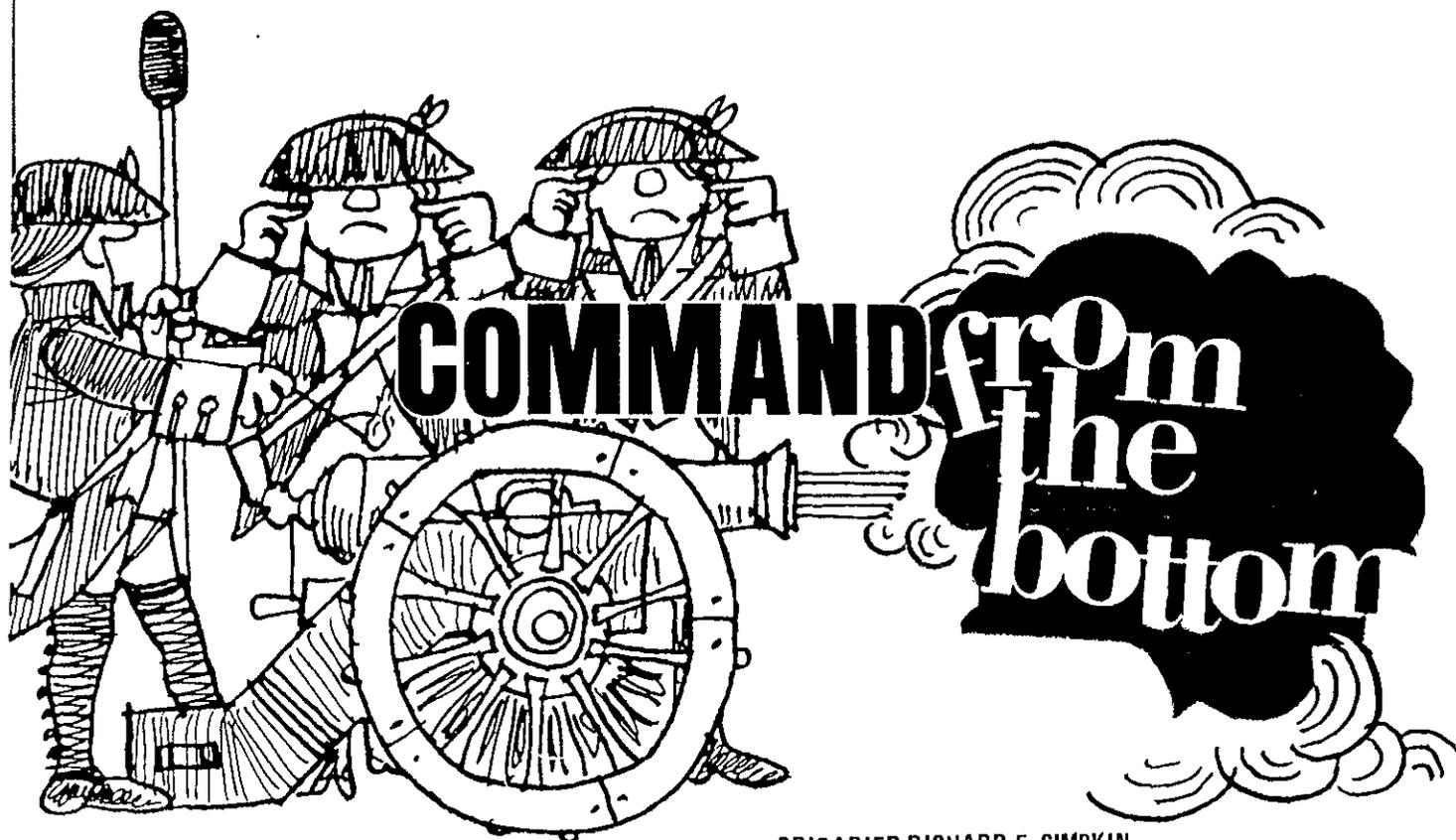
Just as directive control is the key to responsiveness, the key to directive control is a chain of trust and mutual respect that runs unbroken from the senior operational commander (army group or whatever) to the squad leader and the tank commander. I have fully explored the upper and middle links of this chain in a book to be released soon. Here, however, I want to address the problems of the lowest links and to demonstrate that the chain needs

one more link — from squad or fire team commander to the soldier in the ranks.

As a foreigner, I must admit that I had some difficulty finding a major American sport to use as an analogy. Football, ice hockey, and basketball, for example, are all controlled by a coach who calls prearranged plays from the sidelines, and these games are frequently interrupted for changes of players and various forms of time out. They are, therefore, an exact sporting analog of the control of troops by detailed orders (*Befehlstaktik*). In baseball, batting and running between bases may call for instant judgmental decisions, but essentially these decisions are made on the individual level. So I hope enough U.S. Infantrymen now watch soccer on television for me to use it as common ground.

In soccer, the team captain, a player, exercises both leadership and tactical command, and the play flows on with as few interruptions as possible. The basis of success is "horizontal team spirit" — horizontal in the sense that there are only two levels, the skipper and the rest. In certain situations a player (the goalkeeper facing a corner kick, for instance) assumes local tactical command. Otherwise, the skipper issues orders only when a change of tactics is called for. The players respond to the situation as they see fit on the basis of their individual skills, their team training, and the situation itself. "Running off the ball" (maneuver) is at least as important as playing it or tackling (combat).

The players' freedom of action is restricted in three



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ways: first, by the rules of the game and the actual situation (which together correspond to the total situation in war); and, second, by conforming to certain principles and drills that have been found to pay off. In soccer and war alike, these are a matter of training; some of them may be covered by "set pieces" (SOPs). Then, third, there are such one-time conditions as the state of the pitch, the makeup of one's own team on a given day, and, above all, the characteristics of the opposition. The coach has to brief his team on these conditions before the game and must issue special instructions on preferred plays and on moves or techniques that are to be avoided.

To complete this sporting analogy, though, we must push it one stage further. In an isolated match, or in the final of a major competition, the aim is simply to win. But now consider a league competition that lasts the whole season. Here the outcome of an individual game is important, but winning it is only an immediate (tactical) aim. The ultimate (operational) aim is to win the league. Broad decisions on the training and the methods needed to achieve this are made not by the captain but by the coach or manager (the operational commander). And matters affecting the resources available, such as buying and selling players or fostering support, are decided upon one level higher still, by the club's chairman or board of management (the strategic commander or war cabinet).

This higher-level planning may call for decisions that trade off immediate benefits for long-haul advantages — buying promising young players — or for decisions that reduce the chances of winning a particular game — resting key players or playing so as not to lose, which is quite different from playing to win.

We now have three levels of command, each of which makes a different functional contribution to the overall aim of winning the league. Yet the club must remain a single entity. All three levels must pull together, just as the players must cooperate with one another. At the same time, each level and each individual within it must be given the freedom of action to make the best possible contribution. This is what I mean by "vertical team spirit" — the moral basis of directive control.

I will next address what I believe to be the underlying and characteristic principle of directive control, using terms I have arrived at by studying the relevant parts of German command manuals from the 1920s to the present, and from discussions with distinguished German officers and with interpreters of the doctrine. Because these manuals are on a razor edge between coordinated initiative and anarchy, they tend to be a bit misleading in some of the key issues. Discussion and historical example are much more helpful.

From these I am in no doubt whatever that *nothing laid down from above in advance is sacrosanct*. It was Helmuth von Moltke (the elder) who coined the phrase we know as "No plan survives contact." A subordinate commander, applying his trained judgment, is justified, in the light of his superior's intention, in modifying or even changing the task assigned him. As one source

makes clear, in the last resort, he would even be right to go against his superior's expressed intention in the light of some broader intention that he knew of. That's quite a bellyful in more senses than one. What I think it means at root is that culpable insubordination ceases to be a matter of disobedience to a specific order and becomes a matter of intent — just as proof of guilty intent is required to sustain a murder charge. This is why the whole thing has to turn on mutual respect and trust.

Under both "control by detailed orders" (the Anglo-American system) and directive control, a commander exposed to fire in effect entrusts his life to his subordinates when he issues orders that delegate action to them. The difference is that in control by detailed orders he relies only on their skill and courage. His subordinates must do what he has told them or die in the attempt. But under directive control he relies on their judgment as well. (I know he should probably be leading from the front, but I have ruled this out here to highlight a fundamental point.)

Not even in the *Wehrmacht*, though, was the principle of directive control universal. Off the field of battle, discipline was a matter of orders and obedience, as we understand them. In action, too, the principle was sometimes overridden. A "strong" superior commander would get things done the way he wanted by force of personality and status. Or sometimes a superior, perhaps two levels up, would issue what General F.W. Mellenthin has aptly described as a "mission in blinkers" — in effect a direct order. Significantly, a large proportion of the specific failures in Erich von Manstein's defense of the Ukraine in 1944 were due to infringements of the principle of directive control — often to the extent of overriding a protest from the commander on the spot.

By contrast, the Germans — unlike the Americans and the British — accept the principle of *forward control* by higher tactical commanders. On two famous occasions, Erwin Rommel and Hasso von Manteuffel (both divisional commanders at the time) actually assumed command of the leading subunit. Manteuffel puts it like this:

I was always located where I could see and hear what was going on "in front," that is near the enemy, and around myself — namely at the focal point! Nothing and nobody can replace a personal impression.

As I see it, the *quid pro quo* of control by detailed orders is noninterference once orders have been issued. Given mutual trust and respect, it surely makes sense for the most talented and experienced man to be on the spot, if he can, to make the crucial decision.

ELEMENTS OF DIRECTIVE CONTROL

The controlling operational commander studies the situation (*Lage*) and forms his intention (*Absicht*). He explains this intention to his subordinates, perhaps two levels down, and it becomes their ultimate guideline. Next (again perhaps two levels down), he lays down the task



(*Auftrag*) assigned to each subordinate; this becomes the subordinate's principal immediate guideline. He then gives the resources (*Mittel*) allocated to each subordinate, and the coordinating instructions. (These were at one stage referred to as constraints, but the latest German command manual uses the word *koordinieren*, which strikes me as more positive.) Within this framework, of situation, task, resources, and coordination, the subordinate has freedom of action.

Much of the coordinating detail found in U.S. operations orders and annexes is covered in SOPs. But wherever the need for judgment may arise, these SOPs are themselves framed on the principle of directive control. We can forget about this detail, which in the future will be covered by data processing and transmission down to brigade and probably battalion level. Likewise, the mechanics of directive control, simple as they are, mainly concern higher levels. So I will leave it at that and drive the point home by stressing that the *Wehrmacht's* army operations orders for major operations during World War II often covered just one quarto page, and never more than three or four.

The clue to freedom of action without chaos lies in immediate, full, and accurate reporting. Covering up foul-ups and errors of judgment is not acceptable. But this is only one side of the coin of mutual trust. To make sure commanders and key staff officers are in one another's minds, briefings and discussions between levels have to be as continuous as circumstances allow. In the ideal, command decisions are not so much made at the top level as they are generated from the bottom up — whence the title of this article, a particularly apt phrase recently used in *INFANTRY* by Steven L. Canby (see July-August 1984, p. 28).

Every platoon commander in every army is trained to command a company (one level up) and to think "two down" (to the squad leader) while doing so. To achieve

its full flexibility, directive control calls for harmony in thinking two up and two down. This means that, to be able to replace a casualty in the field, a commander must know enough about handling a brigade to be able to interpret the situation to the brigade staff, as well as to the divisional staff if he should suddenly have to take over a battalion. This may sound fantastic, but it has been an important principle in the training of German officers, especially General Staff officers, ever since the days of the elder Moltke. By the same token, a soldier in the ranks should be told enough to give him a good working understanding of the company plan and also an inkling of what the battalion is trying to do.

There seems to be considerable difference of opinion among German officers of various arms and vintages about the appropriateness of tasking two down. The more deliberate school feels that every level of headquarters has a contribution to make to the plan and should be given the opportunity to make it. But *Wehrmacht* practice in maneuver warfare was frequently to task two levels down. (Some of my recent studies suggest that tasking two down, like *thinking* two down, makes good sense.)

Looking up from a combat unit to the heights, one is apt to be reminded of the rhyme: "Big fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em; and little fleas have lesser fleas, and so ad infinitum."

In fact, though, different levels of headquarters have different functions. From the controlling operational headquarters (say, army) down to the company, the planning and the executing headquarters alternate. For example, at operational level, an army plans while a corps executes, so the army tasks the higher tactical formation — division. At the higher tactical level, the division plans and a brigade (or task force) executes, so the division tasks its battalion (or even company) combat teams. At the lower tactical level, the battalion plans, and a company executes. But the battalion doesn't usually task platoons because from company down there's little planning and a lot of doing.

If you went around asking the officers and enlisted men of modern armies in the Western democracies where the weak links in the chain of command were, the only printable answer you'd get would be: "We don't have any in *our* outfit." Under pressure, though, some might allow that "all the links are strong, but some are stronger than others."

The fact is, there are and always will be weak links in any chain of command in the armed forces and in industry alike. They come in two kinds — systemic weaknesses, like the Soviets' officer/NCO gap (which they had to set about bridging with a new kind of warrant officer), and individual weaknesses because some folks are better soldiers than others, and some get promoted to the point where they ceiling out (as in the "Peter Principle"). Directive control requires an unbroken chain of trust and mutual respect from top to bottom. Systemic weaknesses have to be identified, faced up to frankly,

and eliminated. Individual weaknesses, which will never be eliminated, have to be bridged by a special kind of discipline.

There are maybe three kinds of discipline. The easiest to achieve and most fragile is *imposed* discipline, associated with conventional recruit training and control by detailed orders. Next comes *accepted* discipline, which one might describe as "passive team spirit"; this generally prevails in good field force units. The third is what I'd like to call *self-generating* discipline; this is the same thing as team spirit in the full sense, where each man thinks for the team and acts on his own initiative in its best interests. Few, I think, would question this as a goal; the only small problem is how to get there.

TRAINING FOR MORAL LEADERSHIP

I hate phrases like "moral leadership," but this happens to be the most widely accepted term to use here. Let me cut it down to size. If "leadership" is getting other people to do something they don't want to do, "moral leadership" is working out what you ought to do, then forcing yourself to do it for the sake of the team — in other words, self-generating discipline.

There are at least three good reasons why soldiers should be brought up this way from the moment they join. As the U.S. Army Infantry School is better aware than most, NATO's greatest asset is not the chip, but the "chip off the old block" — the intelligent, educated, independent-minded, resilient, democratic citizen of a soldier. Training should develop these qualities from the start instead of crushing them. Second, just as the child is the father of the man, the rookie is father of the NCO; soldiers need to begin the way they mean to continue. Third, whether it is a large-scale mechanized maneuver, a heliborne assault, or a quasi-guerrilla activity in the hills, the kind of tempo that will win tomorrow's war requires a flexibility that only directive control can achieve. (I know that what I am going to describe is very much the way the U.S. Army trains its Rangers, but maybe I can provide a new slant or two.)

This training philosophy stems in fact from Kurt Hahn, who founded a boy's school called Salem (Germany) that was based on it. Tossed out of Germany by the Nazis, he founded Gordonstoun, where the Duke of Edinburgh and his sons were educated. The Duke, then a serving naval officer, fed the idea into the Royal Navy under the name "expedition training." Then it also caught on in the British Army, which was at that time giving much thought to actions by remnants of units after battlefield nuclear strikes.

In expedition training, no direct effort is made to "knock people into shape" or to impose a stereotype. Rather, those individuals undergoing the training are immersed in a carefully but discreetly controlled general environment that is designed to develop in them certain aspects of character from within. This is complemented

by special environments (mostly arduous or dangerous sports) that entail a genuine if remote risk to life and that can be mastered only by combining individual skill and initiative with teamwork. Evidently both general and special environments can be oriented toward physical or mental attainment, and toward specific goals within these categories. But balance and versatility are key elements in this approach.

The pressures generated this way are far greater than those produced by conventional training and team games. Typically, four to five percent of the trainees will either crack up or drop out, which is fine. Likewise, some of them will achieve far more than others. This is an aid to selection for promotion or specialist training. But it has no adverse effect, for one of the goals is to make the trainees bring out the best in themselves and also get to know both their limits and their limitations.

The problem with applying this philosophy to the basic training of an army lies in creating a right atmosphere without preselection (as for Rangers or noncommissioned officers) or the example set by trained men in a good field force unit. The solution for the U.S. Army may be to send recruits straight to training companies within field force units located in the continental United States.

The effective application of maneuver theory to all forms of warfare calls for flexibility, speed, and precision of response to a degree that can be achieved only by directive control (*Auftragstaktik*). Directive control gives subordinates right down the line the greatest possible freedom of action in accomplishing the task set for them, even the right to modify the task itself without specific approval.

Mechanically, directive control is a very simple system, but morally, it requires a kind of vertical team spirit — an unbroken chain of trust and mutual respect upward and downward all the way from top to bottom. This in turn calls for new thinking about the training of officers and enlisted men alike. The primary aim of training should be to develop character and individuality so as to create a self-generating discipline.

There is a suitable training philosophy, generally referred to as "moral leadership," and it has been extensively adopted (and adapted) in the British armed forces. The main problem in applying this approach to recruits army-wide is that the creation of the right atmosphere may require the preselection of trainees, or the example set by bodies of trained soldiers.

But the Soviet airborne forces appear to have set themselves the goal of bringing every man to *spetsnaz* (special forces) standards. So "Every Infantryman a Ranger" could be a fair challenge for the U.S. Army.



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