

Leadership... And Command and Control

by Lieutenant Colonel Kevin C.M. Benson

“It’s against anyone’s nature to rush headlong into gunfire. But, for the commander, it’s pride that pushes him. And for his men, it’s the sight of the commander in front of them. At such moments you cannot hesitate.”

(CPT Francois Lecointre, French Army in NYT Times Fax, p. 2, June 6, 1995)

The history of the profession of arms is filled with the exploits of leaders who led from the front. Young Lieutenant Rommel led the bulk of the Württemberg Mountain Battalion in the seizure of Mount Matajur during the Italian campaigns of World War I. He wrote of these feats of arms in *Infantry Attacks*. He inspired his soldiers by placing himself at the decisive point of action and led from the front. Guderian, when serving as a corps commander in the Battle for France in 1940, led his corps from the front. When Guderian’s lead infantry regiments were crossing the Meuse under French fire, he was at this decisive point to better direct the actions of all other arms and fires in support of the crossing effort. Lieutenant Colonel Creighton Abrams led his battalion from the front throughout World War II. General Patton led from the front as a brigade commander in World War I and as an army commander in World War II. He directed efforts on the beachhead at Gela, Sicily, during Operation Husky, and was present when the Hermann Goering division counter-attacked the beachhead.

The trait these great leaders shared was leading from the front, as a visible example to the soldiers they led into battle.

The Armor School, during the Armor Officer Basic Course (in 1977), taught three means of reinforcing the main ef-

fort. These were: priority of fires, placement of the reserve, and the **presence of the commander**. The advance of technology has made this practice less and less likely, the higher in the chain of command an officer goes. Conceivably, we will end up like the platoon leader in the movie *Aliens*, where the lieutenant stayed in the landing craft to be in a position to over-watch his platoon’s monitors.

Rapidly advancing command and control technology is forcing commanders at nearly every level to remain in the command post to be near the monitors that give them the situational awareness to “see” the entire battle and remain in contact with higher headquarters. Indeed, we have found a Napoleonic “hill” from which to see the entire field. Yet this capability removes a key morale factor from the fight, the presence of the commander.

The recent experience of 3d Squadron, 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment in Haiti is a prime example. During its deployment, the squadron was outfitted with cameras that mounted on the barrels of the scouts’ rifles. These cameras connected to the squadron tactical operations center through the radio, thence to the Pentagon. The Army Staff can now watch squad fights from the ultimate in foxholes. This experiment in technology raises the specter of Moltke the Elder, sitting in his railroad car, sending telegraph messages to his far-flung armies during the battle of Koeniggratz. Moltke never saw the battlefield, rather remaining aloof from the fight and sending and receiving reports. What is wrong with this picture?

John Keegan wrote of “post-heroic” leadership in his work, *The Mask of Command*. His conclusion: that in the

nuclear age a leader should not, indeed could not, be heroic — especially at the national level. This was unquestionably true when the threat of mutually assured destruction hung over the planet. But the extension of this conclusion into the tactical and operational realm is incorrect. Keegan also points out the imperatives of command that defined leadership in the past: kinship with common soldiers, sanction of rewards and punishments according to common values, leadership by example, prescription of risk-taking to subordinates, and direct action in putting these principles into effect (p. 343ff, *The Mask of Command*). These imperatives still have a place in the military art, and we cannot let technology eliminate these imperatives of command.

Keegan also briefly touched on the velocity of events, both in their reporting and response. We have seen many examples of this in the past five years, from Kuwait to Haiti. The need for information is such that, for example, everywhere the XVIII Airborne Corps main headquarters goes, CNN follows, both within the headquarters as a means of receiving information, and outside as reporters. The world of operations other than war (OOTW) places the rings of strategic, operational, and tactical arenas within each other, as opposed to the traditional concept of merely overlapping. The pace of events demands that a leader remain abreast of events on the world stage.

There are times when the proper place for the commander IS in the headquarters. Here, he can detach himself from the mundane and think. There are also times, even in the world of operations other than war, when the place for the commander is at the decisive point or the point of danger. The com-

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mander and his staff must retain the bond with the soldiers who daily take the risk of executing the orders of the higher commander. Kinship is still a valid imperative. As Keegan wrote, "Those who impose risk must be seen to share it..." (p. 329, *The Mask of Command*). Our technology for command and control increasingly puts the means of control in the headquarters.

Consider the following hypothetical scenario: An Army corps is selected as the nucleus for a JTF, which will plan and lead a forcible entry of an island nation. When the corps commander takes the first briefing on the operation, his planners recommend that he command from the *USS Mount Whitney*, where he'll be able to control the entire JTF fight, while maintaining contact with the regional commander-in-chief (CINC). Stating that a visit to the front is worth one thousand reports, the corps commander states he will take a small assault headquarters in with the later assault echelons of the forcible entry. When this intention becomes known, the CINC worries that he will not be able to talk to the corps/JTF commander while in transit. As the planning proceeds, it becomes apparent that the commander of the JTF needs to be in a position to respond to the CINC and national leaders, the media, and the requirements of the battlefield, simultaneously and in real time. The *USS Mount Whitney* provides such a medium, allowing the commander access to the electronic high ground and the ability to visit the front.

The command ship provides security and no drain on shore facilities, which are at a premium during the initial phases of the operation. The availability of a U.S. Navy helicopter allows the CJTF to quickly speed to the decisive point when necessary. Indeed, the helicopter in this operation becomes the commander's "horse" carrying him to and from the place on the field requiring his presence. The technology to ensure instant voice and video communication contact is currently available at

higher headquarters and on specific platforms such as the *USS Mount Whitney*. While this appears to be a reasonable compromise, it does remove an option from the commander's range of decisions. The commander CANNOT decide that he will accompany the initial assault, even if that is the right decision. This concentration of technology makes the apparent risk of the commander at the decisive point greater; he may not be in communication with the command and control means necessary to direct a far-flung task force. This is a mistake.

We must give the commander the freedom to go to the point of action, while retaining contact with the means of control and the situational awareness afforded by the electronic "high ground." Doctrine remains the engine of change. FM 100-5, *Operations*, retains the essence of military leadership by stressing the art of command and the science of control. Commanders command, staffs control. The thrust of our drive for technology, especially in the area of information management, must afford us this means. Technology must allow the JTF commander the capability to lead at the decisive point — whether the mission is a parachute assault, amphibious raid, or maritime interdiction operation — while simultaneously controlling the entire JTF fight.

The emerging new world order (or disorder, as it appears) brings with it new missions for the armed forces. The missions themselves are strange, and some are even distasteful. The requirements range from winning a "Desert Storm" type war to UN operations in Haiti and Macedonia. The definition of the vital national interest of the United States will undoubtedly change as the new powers within the world jockey for position. We may even face the demise of the influence of the nation-state, as Martin van Creveld spoke of in *The Transformation of War*. Nevertheless, the requirements of the commander will remain the same: lead by example, share danger, and take deci-

sions based upon the best information available. Call it *coup d'oeil*, *finger-spitzengefuehl*, or situational awareness, but the commander requires technology that gives him the freedom to go to the decisive point and retain the advantages of the technological "Napoleonic hill."

The changing world is unpredictable. The changes in vital national interests, as well as the increasing frequency of OOTW-type operations, will increase the demands on our entire force. The nature of the combined arms team will change, although the concept remains the same: the effects of all arms under the command of one commander, supported by one staff.

The constant in this changing world, even in the era of "post-heroic" warfare, is the commander. As General Patton said, "Staff systems and mechanical communications are valuable, but above and beyond them must be the commander; not as a disembodied brain linked to his men by lines of wire and waves of ether, but as a living presence, an all-pervading, visible personality. The unleavened bread of knowledge will sustain life, but it is dull fare unless seasoned by the yeast of personality" (p. 56, *Leadership*, Cavalry & Armor Heritage series).

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