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“What would my commander wish me to do if he could see what was in front of me?”
– Admiral Lord Nelson

IT may be surprising for an article on the application of Mission Command in the British Army in the 21st century to include a quote from a 19th century naval officer, albeit an exceptional one. But in many ways the British Army of the 21st century has more in common with the Royal Navy of the 19th century than with the British Army of the time. In the 1800s regiments fighting in battles on land were limited by the range and doctrine of direct fire weapons and commanders were invariably within sight of their soldiers. By contrast, the Royal Navy were not only beyond the line of sight but the ability to pass orders was measured in weeks rather than hours. This necessitated a command culture that we now call Mission Command and which is a core tenet of the British Army's approach to land operations and its application on operations.¹

The extensive research² conducted to support the British Army Land Operating Concept stressed a 21st century battlefield that was more dispersed, commanders that were more isolated and by definition a greater necessity for effective Mission Command. However, the 21st century has also created threats to the practice of Mission Command – like ubiquitous situation awareness and increased legislative scrutiny – that need to be recognised and mitigated.³ It's therefore exceptionally timely that the Centre for Army Leadership is producing a book to examine the modern application of Mission Command.

For avoidance of any doubt, Mission Command is founded on the principles of responsibility, unity of command, freedom of action, trust, mutual understanding and the responsibility to act to achieve the superior commanders' intent.⁴ It empowers subordinate commanders and promotes initiative as well as freedom and speed of action. It is the seemingly self-evident solution

to leadership and command in the violent, dangerous and chaotic realm of uncertainty that characterises warfare. In this way it is inextricably linked to the Manoeuvrist Approach, the Army's fighting doctrine for the tactical level.⁵ Mission Command is a pre-requisite and enabler of the Manoeuvrist Approach alongside good intelligence, an all-arms combined approach and commanders focused on

¹Shamir, Eitan (2011). *Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Also see Andrew St George (2012). *Royal Navy Way of Leadership*. London: Cornerstone.

²Colonel Nick English, Paul Elrick, “Casting aside the crystal ball: Putting Wargaming at the heart of force design” *British Army Review*, Issue 185, Autumn 2023.

³Donald E. Vandergriff (2019), “Adopting Mission Command: Developing Leaders for a superior command culture, Annapolis, MD, Navy Institute Press.

⁴Army Warfare Branch, “ADP Land Operations”, Part 3: Command (May 2022): 2-1.

⁵Army Warfare Branch, “ADP Land Operations”, Part 2: The Application of Land Power, Chapter 2.

outmanoeuvring adversaries. To act at a faster tempo than the enemy can react and move into a position of advantage relative to the enemy requires a decentralised command culture where commanders specify their intent (the what and the why) and subordinates use their initiative to achieve the overall intent (the how).⁶

However, to understand the modern application of Mission Command it is important to understand its historical development. But perhaps more importantly how the changing geopolitical context, the character of warfare and military technologies have altered the way that it is being applied. The

⁶John Kiszely, “The British Army & Approaches to Warfare Since 1945” Occasional Paper: The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, Issue 26 (1997): 4. See also Lt Col Langley Sharp (2021) *The Habit of Excellence*, London: Penguin Random House, p. 58-62.

⁷Major Jim Storr *British Army (2003) A command philosophy for the information age: The continuing relevance of mission command*, *Defence Studies*, 3:3, 119-129.

⁸As quoted in Col. T. N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War. The German Army and the General Staff, 1807-1945* (London: Macdonald & Jane’s 1977) 35.

⁹*Ibid.* p.67.

¹⁰*Ibid.* p. 116

¹¹Between 1891 and 1914, many other terms were used to denote concepts of mission command-style tactics in the Prussian Army, like *Freies Verfahren* (“free method”), *Freie Taktik* (“free tactics”), *Auftragsverfahren* (“mission method”). A discussion of the evolution of the terminology is given by Stephan Leisten Schneider in *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschen Heer 1871 bis 1914*. Hamburg: E.S. Mittler and Sohn, 2002.

¹²See also, Citino, Robert Michael (2005). *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years’ War to the Third Reich. Modern war studies*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

¹³Ricardo A. Herrera, *History, Mission Command, and the Auftragstaktik Infatuation*, *Military Review*, July-August 2022, pp. 53-66.

¹⁴Shamir, Eitan (2011). *Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

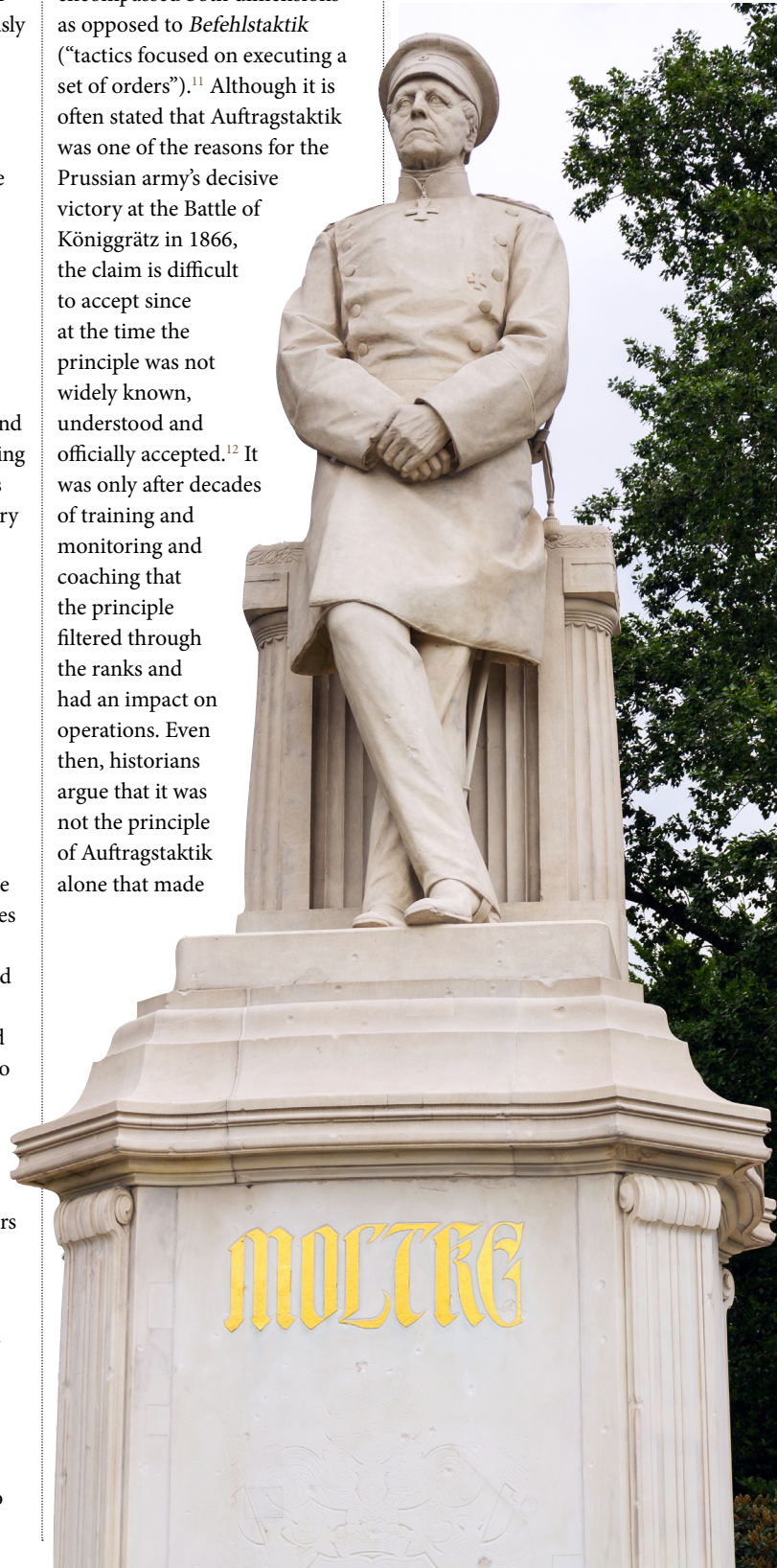
“A FAVOURABLE SITUATION WILL NEVER BE EXPLOITED IF COMMANDERS WAIT FOR ORDERS. THE HIGHEST COMMANDER AND THE YOUNGEST SOLDIER MUST BE CONSCIOUS OF THE FACT THAT OMISSION AND INACTIVITY ARE WORSE THAN RESORTING TO THE WRONG EXPEDIENT.”

German Army is considered the earliest codifier of the concept of *Auftragstaktik*, translated variously as mission command, mission tactics or directive control. At the Prussian Staff College the French successes of 1806-7 had been attributed to the innovative command and leadership style of Napoleon I. The selection of combat formations, their route and rate of advance were based upon the unit’s mission, the terrain and the enemy’s position and movement. Napoleon’s commanders had the freedom and power to adapt in light of changing circumstances and the freedoms challenged the traditional military hierarchy, command structure and discipline.⁷ Major General Gerhard von Scharnhorst taught that the victories had been won by the “complete and aggressive responsiveness of French commanders to the will of Napoleon... even without orders, and miles distant”⁸ After the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) Field Marshal von Moltke the Elder, recognising the administrative difficulty of armies of 200,000 or more, considered commanders should be “assigned general missions, related to fundamental, clearly understood objectives, and then instructed to accomplish those missions by carrying the fight aggressively to the enemy”⁹ Moltke wrote: “A favourable situation will never be exploited if commanders wait for orders. The highest commander and the youngest soldier must be conscious of the fact that omission and inactivity are worse than resorting to the wrong expedient.”¹⁰

Since it was first used, *Auftragstaktik* wasn’t limited to the tactical level of operations

or to a style of leadership. It encompassed both dimensions as opposed to *Befehlstaktik* (“tactics focused on executing a set of orders”).¹¹ Although it is often stated that *Auftragstaktik* was one of the reasons for the Prussian army’s decisive victory at the Battle of Königgrätz in 1866, the claim is difficult to accept since at the time the principle was not widely known, understood and officially accepted.¹² It was only after decades of training and monitoring and coaching that the principle filtered through the ranks and had an impact on operations. Even then, historians argue that it was not the principle of *Auftragstaktik* alone that made

a difference but its application within the wider tradition of command.¹³ Gerhard von Scharnhorst, Carl von Clausewitz and Helmuth von Moltke believed that hard-and-fast rules had no place in the environment of war, which was the realm of friction, chance and uncertainty.¹⁴



Moltke in particular is considered one of the principal advocates of independent thinking and acting among his subordinates.¹⁵

This military philosophical heritage evolved in the First World War as the German Army sought to escape the confinement of trench warfare. On 21st March 1918, the first day of the German Spring Offensive, a German stormtrooper was captured after advancing almost to the British brigade HQ. He was questioned on what his orders were and answered “so weiter, so befier” – ‘the further, the better’.¹⁶ After the First World War, General Hans von Seeckt introduced critical tactical and command reforms based on Auftragstaktik which resulted in a new tactical doctrine manual and informed the training and planning of the inter-war period in Germany.¹⁷ To that end, before the Second World War the German High Command ran multiple exercises starting with small operations and in later years involving large formations and major movements to ensure doctrinal coherence and the opportunity to revise and learn. The lessons learnt were incorporated in its 1933 Field Manual *Truppenführung*.¹⁸ While this is not the place for a full historical overview of the history of Auftragstaktik, the speed and success of the Blitzkrieg of May 1940 suggests a culture where commanders were empowered to exploit situations with a high degree of independence.¹⁹

In spite of this, after the Second World War the British Army remained wedded to an overly proscribed, attritional approach – at least doctrinally. The pamphlet *The Infantry Division in Battle*, published in 1950, warned that tidiness of units was preferable to the speed of the attack.²⁰ Field Marshal Michael Carver, later to become the Chief of Defence Staff, noted “the importance of careful planning... still leads to the lengthy and detailed

conferences and ‘O’ groups and the meticulous planning which is so often criticised by Americans”. He added: “Contrast it with Rommel’s method of command and control and note the results.”²¹ Culture may also have played a part. The heroes whose self-sacrifice and chivalry built the culture and moral component of the British Army in the 19th and early 20th century fought bravely and stoically in a ‘fair fight’. A deep-seated cultural disincentive therefore existed to act in a devious, cunning and ruthless way that exploited any unfair advantage.²² And yet both Liddell Hart and Fuller advocated striking the adversary ‘soft spot’ and in Hart’s case this included “the predominance of the psychological over the physical”.²³

Even at the end of the 1960s the Army’s tactical pamphlet considered “the broad picture of the battle is one of constant attrition”²⁴ whilst Hart’s *Indirect Approach*,²⁵ which was published in 1967 and emphasised dislocating the enemy, avoiding their strength and deception, was dismissed as ‘a delusion’.²⁶ It was not until the impact of American losses in Vietnam and the Israeli focus on attacking the enemy’s cohesion rather than simply taking ground in the Arab-Israeli

conflicts in 1967 and 1971 that a new approach was increasingly considered. Notably this was kick-started by the establishment of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command in 1976 and the formulation of AirLand Battle as the overall American conceptual framework and the manifestation of a new approach to warfare.²⁷

This context had a significant effect on the formalisation of British military doctrine and the introduction of Mission Command into British Army practice as they provided the fertile ground for the vision and reforms of Field Marshal Sir Nigel ‘Ginger’ Bagnall.²⁸ Bagnall, as Commander of 1(BR) Corps in Germany was constrained, as was NATO, by the imperative to conduct a static, passive forward defence on – but not beyond – the Inner German Border, essentially absorbing and delaying the impending Russian shock armies until nuclear weapons could be deployed.²⁹ Bagnall used a small but influential group of bright, innovative thinkers – the ‘Ginger Group’ – to develop the concepts of manoeuvre and mission command which were then published in new doctrine and fighting instructions at every level of command from division to army level.³⁰



Frederick Hart’s *Three Soldiers* bronze statue on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. is part of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

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¹⁵Coumbe, Arthur T. “Operational Control in the Franco-Prussian War,” *Parameters*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 1991), pp. 295–307. Mombauer, Annika. 2001. *Helmut von Moltke and the Origins of the First World War*. Cambridge University Press.

¹⁶Jim Storr, “A command philosophy for the information age: The continuing relevance of mission command,” *Defence Studies* 3:3 (2003):119-129.

¹⁷(H. Dv.487, *Führung und Gefecht der verbundenen Waffen* - “Command and Battle of the Combined Arms, 1921-1923).

¹⁸Condell, Bruce; Zabecki, David T., eds. (2001). *On the German Art of War: Truppenführung*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers. Cooper, Mattheu; *The German Army 1933-45*; London: MacDonald and Jane’s, Corum, James S.; *The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform*; University Press of Kansas 1992.

¹⁹Shamir, Eitan (2011). Herrera (2022).

²⁰War Office, “*The Infantry Division in Battle*,” WO Code 8476, (1950): 21.

²¹As quoted in John Kiszely, “*The British Army & Approaches to Warfare Since 1945*” *Occasional Paper The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute*, Issue 26 (1997): 12.

²²As quoted in John Kiszely, “*The British Army & Approaches to Warfare Since 1945*” *Occasional Paper The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute*, Issue 26 (1997): 13.

²³Alexander Alderson, “*Influence, The Indirect approach and Manoeuvre*” *RUSI Journal* Vol 157 No.1, Feb-Mar 2012.

²⁴War Office, “*Guidance on the conduct of operations of a Battlegroup in North West Europe*,” Army Code 70494, (Jan 1969): 4-5.

²⁵Liddell Hart first published his strategy of the indirect approach in *The Decisive Wars of History* (London: G Bell and Sons, 1929), later republished as *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932). Republished in 1967

²⁶John Terraine, “*History of the “Indirect approach”*” *RUSI Journal*, June (1971): 44-49.

²⁷Richard Lock-Pullan, “*Manoeuvre Warfare: Where Did It Come from and Why?*” *British Military Doctrine Group, Shrivenham 3rd meeting* (13 Dec 2002).

²⁸Williamson Murray argues that military innovation can only be successful when accompanied by the appropriate institutional change and set in a culture that promotes innovative thinking. This suggests that Bagnall’s leadership and reform plans were complemented by historic events around the world and enabled the shift to a doctrinal renaissance. Williamson R Murray, ed. *Military Innovation in the Inter-War Period*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).



“[THE LAND OPERATING CONCEPT] ENVISAGES A FUTURE BATTLEFIELD THAT IS EXPANDED AND MORE TRANSPARENT, EXPOSED TO AND OBSERVED BY SENSORS AND PRECISION WEAPONS SO THAT THE LEGITIMACY OF THE ARMY IS ON SHOW FOR THE WORLD TO SEE.”

Bagnall's reforms focused on altering not only the physical composition of the Army but also its general mentality³¹ and explored the opportunity for the British Army to “seize the initiative from the aggressor, giving the Alliance a much better chance of defeating the enemy, rather than merely delaying him”.³² As such he came to symbolise the efforts of a whole generation of British officers in pursuing new conceptual thinking during the second half of the 1980s.³³ However, the emergence of the manoeuvrist approach was a gradual process starting with the *British Military Doctrine* in 1989, gaining further development in the *Army Doctrine Publication* in 1994 before finally adopting the term Manoeuvrist Approach in the second edition of *British Military Doctrine* in 1996. It was integrated into Britain's first joint doctrine in 1997.³⁴

It's important to note that Bagnall's reforms were shaped by significant strategic, technological and societal shifts and as these shifts accelerate in the 21st century so must we

re-examine the basis for British military conceptual thought. In September 2023 the British Army published its Land Operating Concept in response to changing trends in the character of conflict and outlined a new approach to fighting wars and responding to future threats. The concept envisages a future battlefield that is expanded and more transparent, exposed to and observed by sensors and precision weapons so that the

legitimacy of the Army is on show for the world to see. A greater reliance on data and digital networks is anticipated to increase fragility if/when those links are disrupted. The concept heralds an approach based on finding the enemy as far forward as possible, at every level from corps to section, and neutralising the threat whilst protecting our soldiers and logistics chain by dispersing, deceiving and concealing. It also calls for seizing

and maintaining the initiative in the information environment to call out misinformation and the enemy's missteps. Future expanded battlefields with limited bandwidth, the imperative to minimise radio transmissions to avoid identification and being targeted with long range fires means Mission Command as a philosophy of command remains more relevant and applicable than ever. Jack Watling from RUSI notes battlefield transparency means, regardless of how professional they are, headquarters will be continually disrupted³⁵ – forcing the application of Mission Command. This is despite recognition that, whilst humans will remain in the loop, the growth of artificial intelligence will see a step-change in the speed, accuracy and automation of decision making.

However, it is important not to be complacent. *The Habit of Excellence* recognised that in the British Army today “Mission Command is an ideal to which the Army aspires... but not one that it always succeeds in achieving”.³⁶ The author notes that

²⁹Nigel Bagnall and Maurice Johnston, ‘Concepts of Land/Air Operations in the Central Region: I’, *RUSI Journal* (Vol. 129, No. 3, 1984), pp. 59–62, 60.

³⁰Brian Holden Reid, ‘Bagnall and the Ginger Group in Retrospect’ and Andrew Dorman, ‘Playing the Whitehall Game: The Bagnall Reforms in Retrospect’, papers presented at the 2nd Meeting of the British Military Doctrine Group Conference, Shrivenham, 17 October 2002. See also Colin McInnes, ‘BAOR in the 1980s: Changes in Doctrine and Organisation’, *Defense Analysis* (Vol. 4, No. 4, December 1988), p. 377.

³¹Sangho Lee, ‘Deterrence and the defence of Central Europe: the British role from the early 1980s to the end of the Gulf War’ (PhD thesis, King's College London, 1994), 16.

³²Hansard, ‘Statement on the Defence Estimates’ (25 Jun 1986): 33.

³³Markus Mader, ‘In Pursuit of Conceptual Excellence: The Evolution of British Military-Strategic Doctrine in the Post-Cold War Era, 1989-2002’, *Studies in Contemporary History and Security Policy* No. 13, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004): 104.

³⁴Richard E Simpkin, *Race to the Swift: Thoughts on Twenty-first Century Warfare* (London: Brassey's, October 1985; republished 1994).

³⁵Jack Watling, ‘The Arms of the Future: Technology and Close Combat in the Twenty-First Century’ Book launch, RUSI, London, 5 Oct 2023.

³⁶Lt Col Langley Sharp (2021), *The Habit of Excellence*, London: Penguin Random House, p. 60.

with less experienced soldiers and officers, or more dangerous situations, the freedoms needed to apply Mission Command may be scaled back temporarily. Equally, the 21st century has led to new factors that may impact the implementation of Mission Command in training and affect its effectiveness on operations.

The first is the information revolution. In the past the inability for commanders to communicate with subordinates has encouraged the application of the principles of Mission Command, notably freedom of action. However, the technological ability for non-military strategic decision makers to issue tactical direction is termed the ‘long handled screwdriver’. General Krulak’s³⁷ ‘strategic corporal’³⁸ has led, gradually and almost inevitably, to the phenomenon of the ‘tactical minister’.³⁹ Krulak recognised in 1999 that the proliferation of CNN and 24-hour global news channels meant tactical actions taken by junior soldiers, good or bad, were capable of having a strategic impact on the mission. It was therefore an inevitable

³⁷Charles C Krulak, (1999). “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War”. *Marines Magazine*. Air University.

³⁸Contained in Krulak’s “Three Block War” concept. See journal.dnd.ca/vol10/no1/07-dornwavey-eng.asp. *Canadian Military Journal*.

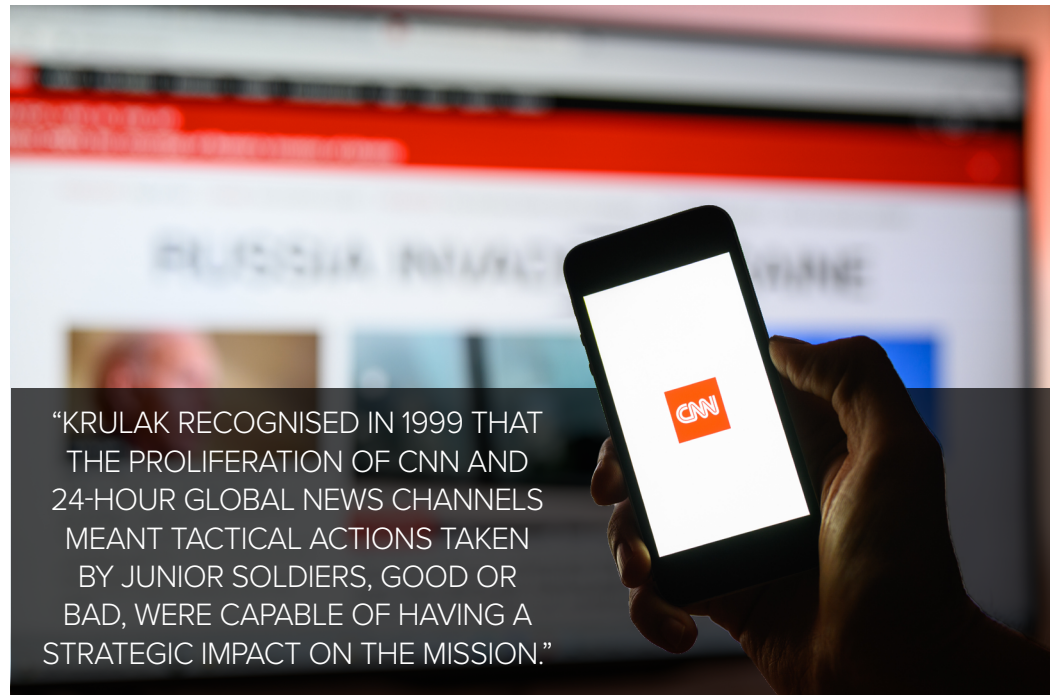
³⁹Wavell Room, “Mission Command: The Fall of the Strategic Corporal & Rise of the Tactical Minister” 23 Apr 2017 wavellooroom.com/2017/04/23/mission-command-the-fall-of-the-strategic-corporal-rise-of-the-tactical-minister

⁴⁰Jim Storr, “A command philosophy for the information age: The continuing relevance of mission command,” *Defence Studies* 3:3 (2003):119-129.

⁴¹Jack Watling, “Supporting Command and Control for Land Forces on a Data-Rich Battlefield,” *RUSI Occasional Paper*, (July 2023):2.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 2.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 2.



“KRULAK RECOGNISED IN 1999 THAT THE PROLIFERATION OF CNN AND 24-HOUR GLOBAL NEWS CHANNELS MEANT TACTICAL ACTIONS TAKEN BY JUNIOR SOLDIERS, GOOD OR BAD, WERE CAPABLE OF HAVING A STRATEGIC IMPACT ON THE MISSION.”

development that ministers would try to manage the risk of someone so junior impacting and potentially derailing national government’s agendas. Hence the growth of the ‘tactical minister’ – typically characterised as an elected official, rather than a military professional, who attempts to affect decisions ‘on the ground’ to minimise strategic risk but oblivious to the tactical or operational context. Ironically, it is the same global communication technology that gave the corporal strategic impact that enables the ‘tactical minister’ to see and affect the tactical level. This technological ability is referred to by Jim Storr as a sliding scale of five ‘ins’. Interest, involvement, and influence by political leaders in operations at the strategic and operational level is both normal and welcome within a defined and agreed command structure. Additionally, Storr points out that intervention remains the duty of government within a democracy to ensure the interests of the country are maintained. However, in Storr’s view, interference has all too often hampered Mission Command seemingly because technology has allowed it.⁴⁰ This is supported by Jack Watling,

“battlefield hyper-connectivity is now realisable for militaries”, as the promise is that achieving greater situation awareness is likely to secure “a competitive advantage over those who cannot”.⁴¹ However, as Watling points out, this ability for greater situation awareness enables the trajectory that soldiers were previously trusted to maintain without supervision to be “altered in flight”.

General Rupert Smith’s chapter in the upcoming Centre for Army Leadership book outlines that establishing the atmosphere for Mission Command to be applied and developing the capability of subordinates to apply it is the duty of the commander long before reaching the operational theatre or line of departure. General Smith is adamant that discipline, imposed by the commander, is “the glue that holds teams together when threatened [and]... the primary antidote to fear”. Ironically, for Mission Command to be practiced in the 21st century discipline may need to be culturally inculcated not on subordinates, but on commanders. As Watling says “[it is] important for commanders

to exercise greater command discipline because the [digital] architecture would give sight of (and the ability to direct) sub-tactical activity”. He notes it would be disastrous for operational commanders to be “drawn into interfering with tactical activity”⁴² and that technological developments must drive a “new culture of command”. In short, discipline now means that the commander doesn’t get what he/she wants without question. Discipline now means the commander must evaluate whether they actually need to know that piece of petty tactical information. As Watling suggests it will “demand training and the development of a culture of command that distinguishes between and separates out command from control.”⁴³

The second related challenge is the link between Mission Command and Command Responsibility, the two are strictly interconnected and one cannot stand without the other. According to the Command Responsibility’s principle, a commanding officer is always accountable for the acts of commission and the acts of omission of their soldiers. It is

an important principle based on the principle that the right to engage in warfare must be counterbalanced by the duty to observe the *ius in bello* as war is an inherently dangerous and chaotic effort in which things may easily run astray, particularly in a scenario in which Mission Command is the guiding principle. Commanders are entrusted and empowered to make the best decision to achieve the commander's intent but the responsibility to control these forces rests on the shoulders of military commanders, who may be held accountable if they fail to perform this primary task. Only fairly recently – after World War II – the doctrine has entered the realm of criminal law. And yet, as the CHACR *Agile Procurement* research project identified, the culture of financial planning and spending in the Army and across Defence is one of tight controls, management rather than command, minimal risk, and ownership at General Officer level without the ability to delegate authority to lower, tactical levels. This day-to-day culture of control suggests the pendulum has swung firmly towards Command Responsibility in the everyday and away from a culture of Mission Command.

Of course, the application of Mission Command on operations can have critical political repercussions and is closely scrutinised by the government, the opposition, the media and the public. The Land Operating

Concept states the legitimacy of the Army is on show for the world to see.⁴⁴ However, General Kiszely has pointed out a commander with narrow policy and political boundaries will not be able to delegate decision making as freely as he may otherwise do. The result being that decision making is held at a much higher level, subordinates must request permissions more often and speed and agility of tactical actions are slower.⁴⁵ The increase in political, media and societal scrutiny can therefore drive a tendency for commanders to be a control freak. This is both fatal to the philosophy of Mission Command and impracticable. As an adviser to a previous US Secretary of State is famously quoted as saying “the 21st century is a really bad time for control freaks” because it simply cannot be done.⁴⁶

The autonomy of commanders, integral to Mission Command, can create political and legal risks that politicians and senior commanders may be increasingly unable to tolerate, thus eroding commanders' autonomy and the critical sense by subordinates that they are trusted by their headquarters. The mantra ‘what would the *Daily Mail* think?’ is often used to test the reasonableness of courses of action and the anticipated political impact that they may have. However, it is not a strategic maxim and can destroy adaptiveness and innovation. It can perpetuate a culture unwilling to take risk for fear of how it may be perceived or punished if it goes wrong.⁴⁷ Equally, it can also manifest itself in an unwillingness to make decisions at all.

In an era of legal ramifications, media exposure and political consequences, commanders' willingness to take responsibility for the mistakes of their subordinates may also decrease. As Jim Storr points out, an important element of trust is the ability to accept well-intentioned

mistakes by subordinates and the potential shouldering of blame by superiors.⁴⁸ I distinctly remember making a minor but potentially dangerous omission on operations. It was identified at the orders session and immediately drew the ire of the senior officer present. At that moment my immediate boss hove himself into the firing line and took the brunt of the criticism square on his chest without any reference to my failings. It was a textbook demonstration of the implications of the trust required for effective Mission Command. Mission Command gives subordinates empowerment with a safety net, a symbiotic balance between trust and control.⁴⁹

The final challenge to the successful application of Mission Command is the lack of imagination. This is especially pernicious given the necessity for the commander working under Mission Command to be a creative thinker, able to apply originality and imagination and judge and take risks based on fleeting opportunities.⁵⁰ As Major David Devine points out, avoidance of risk, rather than prudently evaluating risk, “simultaneously promotes efficiency and hinders creativity.”⁵¹ Circumstances may also have an impact. The US Army *Doctrine Publication 6-0, Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces* highlights, fairly reasonably, that a unit's culture of command may need to be more authoritarian if leaders lack training, little cohesion exists, and trust needs to develop.⁵² Therefore in the context of funding cuts for training the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2023 highlighted a year-on-year reduction in the confidence of teams in themselves and on other people in their team being relied upon when things get difficult.⁵³ Whilst this may not necessarily denote a long-term trend, where soldiers and their leaders lack training and cohesion

the fact that Mission Command suffers bears note.

The Centre for Army Leadership book examining the modern application of Mission Command is especially timely – not least because as the character of conflict changes we must continually consider how it impacts on the British Army's doctrine and the application of that doctrine. As highlighted in *The Habit of Excellence* it is not just on the battlefield that Mission Command needs to be applied. Indeed, if it is not applied day-in-day-out across the spectrum of military tasks the environment or culture for Mission Command may not be there when the battle starts.

⁴⁴British Army Website News, “Army announces new way of winning future wars”, 16 September 2023.

⁴⁵John Kiszely, “The British Army & Approaches to Warfare Since 1945” Occasional Paper The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, Issue 26 (1997): 5.

⁴⁶Alex Ross, former Senior Advisor for Innovation to the US Secretary of State quoted in Alexander Howard, “Exit Interview: Alec Ross on Internet Freedom, Innovation and Digital Diplomacy” *HuffPost*, 12 Mar 2013.

⁴⁷David Devine, “The trouble with Mission Command: Army Culture and Leader Assumptions” *Military Review*, (Sep-Oct 2021): 36-42.

⁴⁸Jim Storr, “A command philosophy for the information age: The continuing relevance of mission command,” *Defence Studies* 3:3 (2003):119-129.

⁴⁹Lt Col Langley Sharp (2021), *The Habit of Excellence*, London: Penguin Random House, p. 60.

⁵⁰John Kiszely, “The British Army & Approaches to Warfare Since 1945” Occasional Paper The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, Issue 26 (1997): 5.

⁵¹David Devine, “The trouble with Mission Command: Army Culture and Leader Assumptions” *Military Review*, (Sep-Oct 2021): 39.

⁵²US Army Publishing Directorate, “Army Doctrine Publication 6-0, Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces”, (31 Jul 2019): 1-24.

⁵³Ministry of Defence, “Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS),” (1 Jun 2023): 3.

