

Mission Command and Leadership During Sustainment Operations

The complexities of command and support relationships, both at home station and during deployments, necessitate mission command.

■ By Maj. Gen. Darrell K. Williams



In the spring of 2015, I visited the medical and dental facilities at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. I was especially impressed by a young private first class who escorted me through the dental facility portion of the visit. It was a Sunday, a day on which many Soldiers are given time to attend church services, clean their laundry, and take care of other personal business.

Since an officer and senior non-commissioned officer had walked me through the hospital, I wondered quietly, “Where is the officer-in-charge of the dental facility?”

I asked the Soldier about the manning of the clinic, and she very professionally explained that the clinic had been downsized to only a captain as the dentist and herself as the dental assistant. I then asked where the captain was, and she said, “Sir, I gave him the day off.” When I asked who was in charge, she stated, “I’m in charge, Sir.”

As I reflected upon this encounter, I asked myself two questions that illustrate the power of our Army’s leadership model and our concept of mission command. First, how many armies in the world would entrust a private first class to escort a two-star general? Further, how many privates first class in any military, besides our own, would be confident and empowered enough to run the facility and “give the captain the day off?” The answer I suspect is very few if any, and therein lies our greatest strength.

Given the Army’s propensity to conduct highly dispersed mission sets across the full spectrum of military operations, we will continue to depend on Soldiers and leaders at the lowest levels to sustain operations and win in a complex world. Engaged leadership, a thorough understanding of the operational commander’s intent, and dexterity with the concept and tools of mission command will remain among the most important aspects of successful global sustainment operations.

Mission Command

Mission command is both a warfighting function and a powerful philosophy. It is as central to the sustainment warfighting function as it is to intelligence, movement and maneuver, fire support, and protection.

Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-0, Mission Command, states, “Mission command is the 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.”

Mission command encompasses both the art and the science of command; the art is accomplished by agile and adaptive leaders, and the science is supported by critical mission command systems and enablers. In particular, sustainment professionals require highly integrated and synchronized mission command processes from the tactical to strategic levels in uncertain and rapidly changing environments.

Over the past 14 years, decentralized and distributed sustainment operations have persisted. U.S. Army Africa and the 101st Airborne Division’s rapid deployment during the recent Ebola crisis in Liberia was an example of the breadth and scope of operations supported by our sustainment forces.

Similarly, support to the Operation Atlantic Resolve and Pacific Pathways exercises demanded a mission command framework for U.S. Army Europe and U.S. Army Pacific, respectively. While support challenges are as varied as the missions and areas of operations, superior leadership and mission command structure, combined with enabling capabilities, provide the building blocks for successful sustainment operations, regardless of the environment or region of the world.

A Complex Collaboration

Within a theater of operations, mission command systems are an essential prerequisite at all levels.

Movement control teams, financial management detachments, postal platoons, and ammunition platoons often accomplish their missions dispersed in forward locations separated from their higher headquarters.

Sustainment brigades, materiel recovery elements, support battalions of all types, finance and human resources companies, and customs inspectors operate across vast distances, while our expeditionary sustainment commands (ESCs) independently orchestrate support to an entire combined joint operations area.

Meanwhile our theater sustainment commands (TSCs), Army field support brigades, and transportation brigades support the entire combatant command theater of responsibility. Within the TSC headquarters, the human resources and financial management centers enable theaterwide operations.

Given that 80 percent of sustainment units reside in the Reserve component, the interoperability generated by mission command enablers is paramount to our shared understanding and teambuilding. From top to bottom, in all capabilities, leaders need a common operational picture.

The mission command structure for sustainment enables the support we receive from joint and enterprise partners, such as the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command (SDDC), U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM), and Army Materiel Command (AMC).

DLA is the Department of Defense's worldwide service provider for a range of critical supplies and services. Together, TRANSCOM and SDDC provide global military and commercial transportation and distribution of our personnel, equipment, supplies, and retrograded cargo. AMC provides pre-positioned stocks, contracting services, support to commercial off-the-shelf technology, and a direct link to our vast continental United States organic industrial base.

The association of TSCs and ESCs

with these agencies, under the mission alignment of an Army service component command, combined joint task force, or other designated operational headquarters, offers U.S. land forces power projection, global reach, and the ability to conduct sustained operations.

The combatant commander's directive authority for logistics enables Army sustainment forces to provide critical common-user logistics support to our sister services and allied and coalition partners. The Army works with joint, interagency, and multinational partners to ensure sufficient capacity and interoperability to enhance strategic and operational depth and endurance.

The deputy chief of staff of the Army G-4 assists in providing vital policy guidance and oversight for Army sustainment operations. For acquisition, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology develops, acquires, fields, and sustains materiel by leveraging domestic and international, organic, and commercial technologies and capabilities.

Simply put, the full range of military operations involves a very complex interaction between numerous organizations and agencies. This interaction would be much harder to accomplish without mission command.

Mission Command While Deployed

Because of their theaterwide support missions, many organizations provide general support on an area basis rather than direct support to just one command. Even though they do not fall directly under the command and control of each echelon of maneuver commanders, they remain linked by a common purpose and unity of effort.

Unity of effort is achieved through boards, centers, and cells, such as U.S. Central Command deployment and distribution operations centers. These organizations and processes do not fall under our traditional understanding of command and control but clearly assist in achieving

the common understanding required under the auspices of mission command. Success is assured through a clear understanding of the commander's intent and adherence to the philosophy of mission command.

Fundamentally, mission command is far more important and more powerful than traditional command and control. For example, within U.S. Army Central, the 1st TSC is assigned two sustainment brigades: one in Kuwait for support throughout the region to include Iraq, and one in Afghanistan to support Operation Freedom Sentinel and Inherent Resolve. Both brigades report to the 1st TSC's operational command post in Kuwait.

However, the 1st TSC's operational control and tactical control responsibilities, as designated by U.S. Army Central, extend to a larger array of sustainment forces and capabilities. An Army field support brigade, transportation brigade, contracting support brigade, and several smaller organizations operate under the mission command of the 1st TSC.

Several joint and enterprise logistics organizations also plug into this structure to create a seamless common operational picture of sustainment for the operational commander. This mission command arrangement is easily repeated in each combatant command's theater of responsibility.

Broad mission sets and distributed operations necessitate a clear understanding of the operational commander's intent. Distance and communication gaps often preclude face-to-face delivery of mission orders. However, leaders at all levels of our Army are expected to execute effectively in the absence of specific mission orders; it is ingrained in our leadership culture.

Mission Command at Home

Mission command and the application of leadership is as relevant to garrison operations, home-station training, and combat training center sustainment operations as it is to a deployed operations. The critical

support organizations and capabilities that must coalesce to support corps, division, and brigade combat team commanders' intents are equally important.

On our major operational troop installations, brigade support battalions, aviation support battalions, sustainment brigades, and combat sustainment support battalions, Army field support brigades, Army field support battalions, logistics readiness centers, and garrison commands all provide essential elements of support to unit training.

The brigade support battalions and aviation support battalions directly support their maneuver brigades, while combat sustainment support battalions typically provide a broader range of support across the division or corps. AMC units and activities provide varying degrees of critical sustainment support, from installation maintenance to contracting services to supply support activity management.

Depending on the installation, a sustainment brigade, ESC, or TSC provides the division, corps, or Army service component command with oversight and management of sustainment operations. Troop dining facility operations today are run largely by a combination of garrison commands, contractor support, and operational units.

Several of our joint enterprise partners also reside and support Army forces on our installations. DLA runs disposal operations, and SDDC works with installation transportation offices and division and corps G-4s to schedule shipments to and from training centers.

The complexities and array of command and support relationships necessitate mission command. The imperative to integrate and synchronize these operations in garrison is as critical as it is in a theater of operations.

Mission Command Systems

One thing is certain: whether deployed, operating in home-station training, or at a training center, mission command systems and sus-

tainment enablers are critical to our success. What is absolutely required to assist commanders and professionals at all levels to manage this complexity is a common operational picture.

The Army is rapidly transitioning from legacy supply accountability, maintenance, financial management, and human resources information systems that have served us well over the past three decades.

Our legacy systems, such as the Property Book Unit Supply Enhanced, the Standard Army Retail Supply System, the Standard Army Maintenance System-Enhanced, and the Standard Army Ammunition System-Modernization, simply do not provide the auditability or flexibility demanded in this much more dynamic environment.

The Army will adapt useful Battle Command Sustainment Support System software and incrementally deploy interim logistics applications across the range of computing environments. These interim logistics applications will integrate tactical and business data in a graphical orientation, allowing individuals and groups to solve semistructured and unstructured problems, perform sensitivity and goal-seeking analysis, and improve the overall effectiveness of decision-making.

Fortunately, the Army has already transitioned its accounting operations to the General Fund Enterprise Business System (GFEBS). This system replaces or absorbs more than 80 legacy accounting and asset management systems to standardize business processes and transactional input across the Army.

Supply, maintenance, and other critical support functions are presently being assumed by Global Combat Support System Army (GCSS-Army). This system replaces the suite of logistics information systems and integrates field financial management into one system. GCSS-Army will affect every supply room, motor pool, maintenance repair shop, warehouse, and property book in the Army, both in operational units and

in fixed-base operations such as logistics readiness center warehouses and maintenance organizations.

Finally, the Army will begin fielding the Integrated Pay and Personnel System-Army (IPPS-A) in fiscal year 2018, first to the Army National Guard and then to the rest of the Army. IPPS-A is the Army's cutting edge, web-enabled human resources management system for personnel and pay actions.

The system standardizes, streamlines, and shares critical data across the Active Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve. When fully implemented, IPPS-A will create one personnel and pay record for each Soldier for his or her entire career. It will also automate pay procedures so personnel actions automatically trigger associated pay events.

Together and when fully fielded, GCSS-Army, GFEBS, and IPPS-A will usher in a new common operational picture arena and better accountability for commanders and sustainment professionals. Simultaneously, the systems will enable training, garrison support, and full-spectrum operations while deployed.

For more information on these systems, visit <http://www.eis.army.mil/programs/gfebs>, <http://www.eis.army.mil/programs/gcss-a>, and <http://www.eis.army.mil/programs/ipps-a>.

Our culture of leadership and our contemporary environment demand systems and processes to be adaptive, disciplined, and decisive. A private first class is empowered by leadership training, authority, and disciplined initiative in decision-making to run a dental clinic in the absence of the captain; a sustainment professional is enabled by information, communication, and structure to support unified land operations.

Maj. Gen. Darrell K. Williams is the commanding general of the Sustainment Center of Excellence and Combined Arms Support Command at Fort Lee, Virginia.