

101st Sustainment *Validates for Deployment*

The brigade conducted extensive predeployment training to improve its mission command capabilities for what could be its last deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

■ By Col. Charles R. Hamilton and Lt. Col. Christopher R. Liermann



Brigade

The 101st Sustainment Brigade "Lifeliners" command team, along with Maj. Gen. James C. McConville, the commander of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault); Col. Clay Hatcher, the chief of Operations Groups Sierra; and Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Phil Mattox, the brigade commander's senior mentor, participate in a rehearsal of concept drill during the unit's validation exercise, Unified Endeavor 2013. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Mary Rose Mittlesteadt)

As the new commander and staff of the 101st Sustainment Brigade prepared for deployment, they decided on the following priorities of work: set the base for a decisive unit, build the team while ensuring Soldier and family resilience, lay out a strategy for predeployment and deployment, build relationships, coordinate with current and future headquarters, and effectively communicate the command's mission to both military and nonmilitary organizations.

Formulating a plan for these priorities came from many sources, including a May–June 2011 *Army Sustainment* article by Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mitchell H. Stevenson, “Tips From Sustainment Brigade Commanders.” Stevenson’s article outlined tips that focused on predeployment, engagement, nesting, and mentoring. The Lifeliners’ command group used these tips from successful sustainment brigade commanders’ experiences to shape the training objectives for their upcoming deployment validation exercise.

With many tools at hand, which ones should the command choose to build the pillars of success? What training and validation is required to train one of the most dispersed units—a unit with arguably the greatest mission command challenges and one of the most diverse mission sets—in the Afghanistan theater of operations?

This would be the 101st Sustainment Brigade headquarters’ third deployment to Afghanistan in five years. Although the brigade would occupy the same terrain as in previous deployments, the deployment process remained a challenge because the Afghanistan environment is continuously evolving and the brigade had to adjust to those changes.

The brigade looked at the tools the Army offers to prepare for the diverse mission set. The Mission Command Training Program is the most effective method used by the Army to validate a sustainment brigade before deployment. Unified Endeavor 2013

(UE 13–1), a division and corps level exercise, served as this validation for the 101st Sustainment Brigade.

Objectives

The command, in coordination with the staff, developed the following training objectives that would be critical to successfully developing the brigade’s staff and subordinate units:

- Exercise mission command.
- Exercise and gain battle rhythm proficiency.
- Operate in an environment that effectively replicates the logistics demands of the combined joint operations area.
- Exercise the battle staff in prioritizing, allocating, and managing ground transportation and aviation assets across the area of operations.
- Familiarize the staff with the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Materiel Retrograde Element (CMRE).
- Train staff on mission command and knowledge management systems.
- Develop an understanding of the deployed operational environment and its complexity.
- Understand how other enablers, including outside agencies, support the unit and its mission requirements.

Mission Command

Mission command, the warfighting function that serves as the foundation of all others, is taught by the Mission Command Training Program’s Operations Group Sierra, a brigade-level staff training team from the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. In order to achieve the Lifeliners’ training objectives, mission command had to be the essential synchronizing function for the brigade staff and subordinate units.

Mission command is defined in Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3–0, Unified Land Operations, as “the related tasks and

systems that develop and integrate those activities enabling a commander to balance the art of command and the science of control in order to integrate the other warfighting functions.” (See figure 1.)

Getting the staff integrated and synchronized with the commander’s intent was challenging, but as the preparation and training progressed, the brigade proved to be adept and ready.

Training

Preparing an organization after multiple deployments has its challenges. The most notable challenge is training the people to the mindset of the current and upcoming fight. A systematic approach is needed to build a flexible, yet cohesive, team.

Refit with a completely new staff, the brigade went to the Leadership Training Program (LTP) conducted at Fort Polk, La. LTP is staff-oriented training that hones the skills of battalion- and brigade-level staffs in the military decisionmaking process (MDMP) and mission command. This was an opportunity for the staff to work through the detailed problem-solving and staff synchronization exercises required to build a cohesive team.

In the end, the brigade staff worked through mission analysis and course of action development—not completing the MDMP. However, the time, effort, and energy expended proved invaluable to the staff and command team. It increased their confidence in one another and validated the doctrinal process used. This was demonstrably effective in helping the command understand, visualize, describe, direct, lead, and assess the plans and operations the units were about to conduct.

The next training step in preparing for UE 13–1 and the deployment to Afghanistan was for Operations Group Sierra to facilitate a seminar and demonstrate to the organization what would be expected during the culminating exercise at Fort Campbell, Ky. The seminar included reviewing doctrine, such as ADRP 5–0,

The Operations Process, and ADRP 6-0, Mission Command, and describing the doctrinal roles and responsibilities of the commander and staff during the MDMP and tactical operations center (TOC) operations. This seminar was extremely valuable to the command and staff, re-emphasizing the brigade's desired training outcomes as well as the symbiotic relationship with the staff.

The Culminating Exercise

During UE 13-1, the staff conducted multiple problem-solving ex-

ercises based on real-world scenarios. This allowed the staff to focus on the inherent friction points within a staff and the notional external support role performed by the brigade's support operations office (SPO). These scenarios involved events that replicated support to the Soldier but also dealt with internal systems and potential incidents.

The scenarios allowed the staff to practice their standard operating procedures, internal and external synchronization, and internal coordination of information. Operations Group Sierra brought a rigorous

training program tailored to the staff along with training objectives. These objectives enabled the Mission Command Training Program team to influence how the staff saw itself conducting mission command. During the exercise, it became apparent to the command that the objective, self-reflective method of measuring the brigade's process proved successful as the staff members shared information with each other, subordinates, and the commander.

In addition, the scenarios required the staff to analyze the possible second- and third-order effects of the

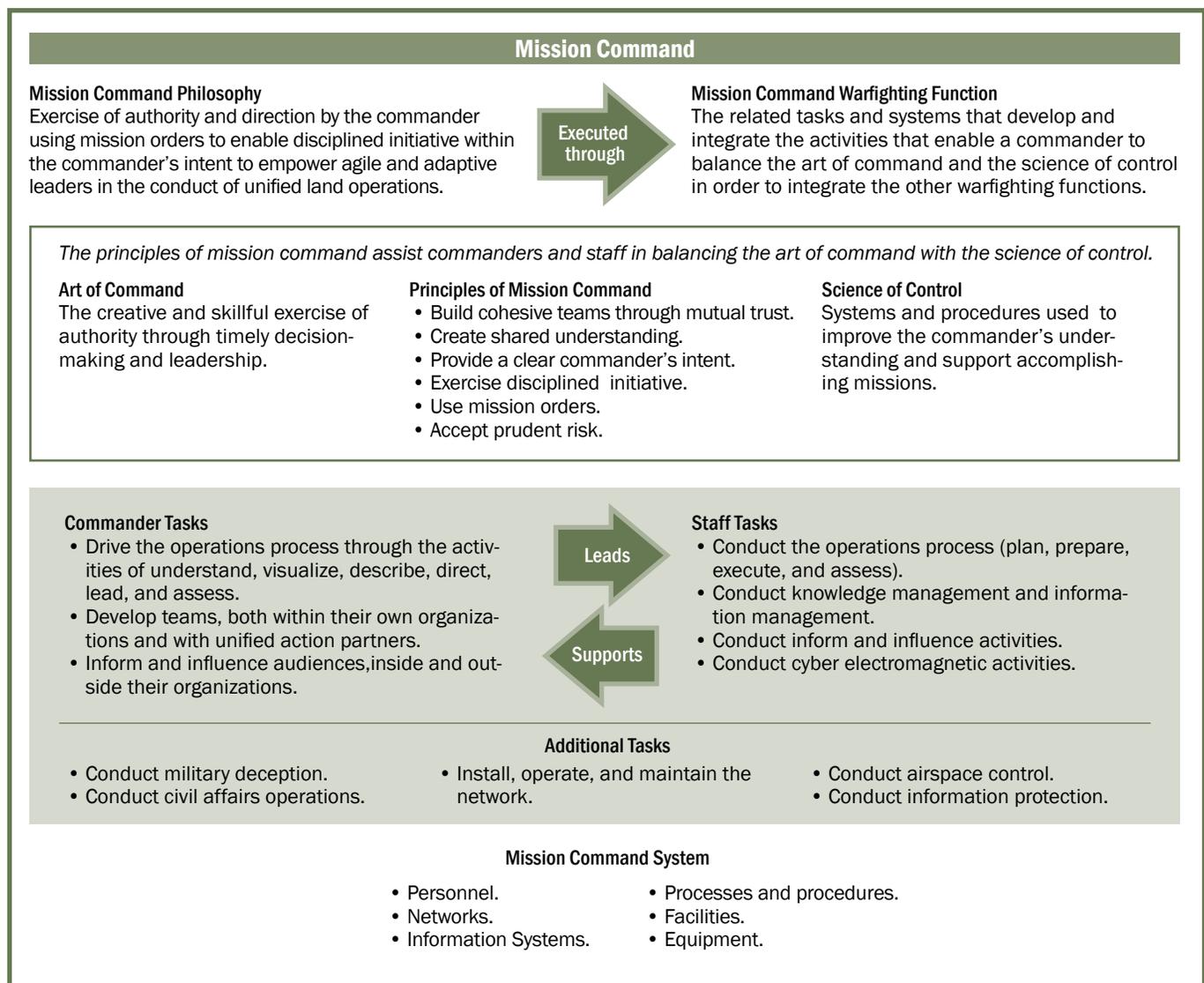


Figure 1. This chart depicts the principles, tasks, and roles of mission command as well as the challenges that a staff and commander must balance and overcome to achieve synchronization. Together, the mission command philosophy and warfighting function guide, integrate, and synchronize Army forces during unified land operations.

organization's actions or actions of the enemy. These events were grueling because of the constant monitoring of the situation and extensive internal and external coordination. The staff learned how changing or fine-tuning procedures improved information dissemination to the right staff sections for action during scenarios.

Outside of the realm of the training exercise, the brigade conducted multiple rehearsal of concept (ROC) drills for senior leaders during the exercise. These senior leaders included the commanding generals of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and the Combined Arms Support Command and the deputy commanding general for support for the 101st Airborne Division.

The ROC drills focused on two major operations for the Lifeline brigade, the concept of support for the

multiple regional commands, and the CMRE process—recycling, demilitarizing, recovering, and retrograding equipment and supplies out of the Afghanistan theater. This helped the senior leaders understand the complexity of the brigade's mission.

ROC drills play a vital role in a planning process because they reinforce the tasks and objectives the staff must focus on to successfully accomplish the mission. They also bring the diverse team together in a common mission.

After Action Reviews

After the ROC drills and throughout the exercise, the best way to validate that the brigade was ready for its deployment was to conduct after action reviews (AARs).

Operations Group Sierra facilitated the AAR process with the entire brigade staff and the command

for UE 13-1. The first AAR, called the mid-exercise AAR, had multiple objectives. The first was to recognize anything significant that required immediate attention. Next it identified systems or procedures with shortfalls that could be addressed before the final AAR. Finally, it analyzed and identified individuals and teams that needed assistance in their tasks to be more efficient. This entire process showed how all of the moving pieces fit into the fundamental art of command and science of control philosophy.

During the initial days of UE 13-1, Operations Group Sierra simulated all of the identified training objectives and addressed them during the mid-exercise AAR so corrections could be made as the exercise moved forward. During the mid-exercise AAR, the brigade assessed itself to be in the lower half of the "information" area of its TOC functionality. (See figure 2.)

The staff began to produce and disseminate information laterally within the staff and also vertically to the brigade's higher headquarters and subordinate units. This visualization of where the staff saw itself played a critical role in how the brigade would continue to improve in its processes, procedures, and common operational picture.

After the staff assessed its internal processes, the TOC environment as a whole improved. All personnel were required to attend the AAR. This requirement was beneficial because often during the exercise individuals did not realize the impact their action or inaction had on other staff sections and the entire mission. Painting this picture was a key and essential bridge for the staff and resulted in positive, constructive action. Based on the actions and improvements made after the mid-exercise AAR, the brigade staff continued to improve on its journey toward validation and deployment.

The final AAR focused on the scenarios themselves and how the organization responded through

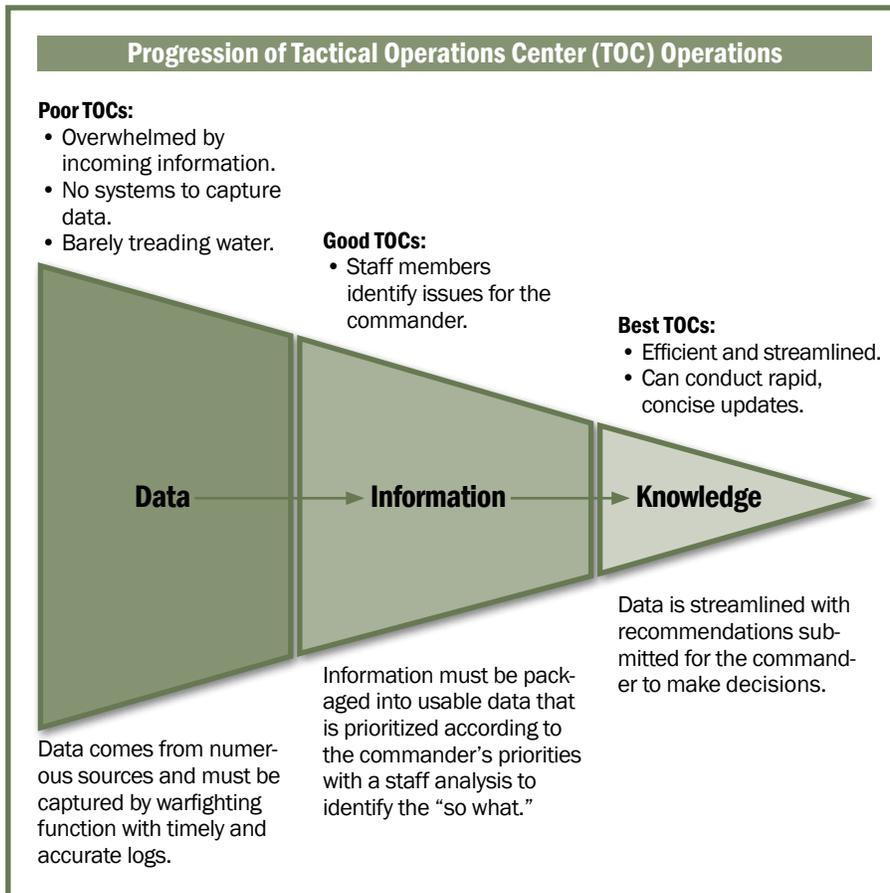


Figure 2. This chart illustrates how a tactical operations center can progress from sharing and disseminating data to information to knowledge (left to right).



Col. Charles R. Hamilton and Command Sgt. Maj. Eugene Thomas, the command team of the 101st Sustainment Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), case the brigade colors, April 12, at Fort Campbell, Ky., before deploying to Afghanistan. (Photo by Sgt. Leejay Lockhart)

the processes in place and the improvements of those processes from the mid-exercise AAR. The trainers continued to tailor the scenarios to mimic real-world missions within the Afghanistan theater so that they could be cross-coordinated and synchronized by the staff. By the time Operations Group Sierra prepared and delivered the final AAR, the brigade staff had grown in its understanding of staff processes, procedures, and the command-staff relationship. As shown in figure 2, the brigade moved into the higher echelon of providing timely, accurate information and into the realm of sharing knowledge.

Understanding processes and procedures and sharing information and knowledge enable growth within an organization. The organization becomes cohesive and productive when efficient systems and procedures are in place, constraints and restrictions

are known, and information is dispersed correctly to those who need to know.

The brigade's ability to perform self-assessment before conducting sustainment operations in Afghanistan allowed the commander to execute his intent for mission command and have the faith that his staff and subordinate commands could execute using decisive action.

Below are some insights and objectives for units deploying or going into a significant training exercise:

- Engage your spouses and Soldiers early and often. Implement resiliency training in all aspects of your plan, and inform them of the plan for predeployment, deployment, and post-deployment.
- Review and learn doctrine, starting with ADRP 5-0 and ADRP 6-0; it works and proved invaluable to the brigade.

- Seek training opportunities wherever you can; LTP was a training event that greatly enhanced our staff preparedness.
- Bring the Mission Command Training Program into your organization at the earliest opportunity. The trainers' professionalism, experience, and knowledge will make you and your team better, and their nonbiased coaching and mentoring is crucial.
- Use a ROC drill to add value across the spectrum by providing mentorship opportunities for junior officers and improving data mining, communication, knowledge sharing, and overall professional development for junior and senior leaders.
- Keep it "old school"—a map on the floor with leaders briefing and walking across the map by phase of the operation encourages discourse. New nuggets of information came out every time we briefed it.

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