



Do Orders really matter?

Validating the essential combat communication

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As the section shuffled in to the training shelter the commander began with the usual preliminaries “...*right boys, here’s the seating plan – scouts over here, 2IC here and gun-group on my right*”. With those simple words six infantry soldiers began the ritual of receiving mission orders. On this day, the section, as part of the platoon, in turn part of the lead company of the First Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment (1 RNZIR), would execute a combined-arms live-firing day and night deliberate attack; perhaps one of the most dangerous and complex peace time activities in the New Zealand Defence Force.¹

In late April the Commanding Officer (CO) 1 RNZIR, Lieutenant Colonel Grant Motley, sought an external evaluation of A (Alpha) Company during Exercise Absolute. While the evaluation focused on decision-making by the company commander (OC) during a live-firing attack, allowance was made for observation of the orders process from the CO through to the section commander.

This article highlights the essential combat communication, mission orders, and the commander’s intent. It describes the means and methods by which a *vertical-slice* of commanders interpreted and analysed their orders; how they formulated and communicated their plan, and how the company commander monitored and adjusted the plan during its execution. The article is written primarily for junior leaders but also has utility for training staff, particularly practical lessons regarding the orders process.

Context and Setting

At the time of evaluation 1 RNZIR had been on exercise for 21 days. The full orders process, from battalion commander through to section commander, had occurred five times. For many commanders the tasks were becoming routine and entailed well practiced battle-drills. In short, Alpha Company was 'in the groove'; familiar with field orders and peaking at their implementation of cavalry doctrine and the execution of subunit standard operating procedures (SOPs).²

The prime publication that embodies the New Zealand Army's method and means of mission orders is the P86 Staff Officers Handbook. As the name infers it is a doctrinal tool designed for staff officers. Herein lies a limitation of the P86. Principally focused at the brigade level many of the higher level concepts and operational constructs struggle to be interpreted and then translated for direct utility for lower level organisations. For example, whilst a company commander may be well versed in the P86, its usefulness for the subordinate platoon and section commander's is lacking. In most cases these subordinate commander's receive their training in the orders process from their trade 'school-house' instructors (e.g. Combat School)³ who translate the seemingly abstract in to the necessary detail at the *point of the spear*.⁴ But do they really? And if so how effectively?

Orders: A combined-arms, live-firing day and night company attack!

Battalion orders

At 1730 hours the battalion operations officer (S3) commenced delivery of the preliminary details for the 1 RNZIR formal orders.⁵ As the key task involved live-firing, the audience included extra range and safety staff. The orders followed the familiar GSMEAC⁶ format. Frequent references were made to operational constructs such as shaping, decisive and sustaining operations with liberal use of tactical terms and effects. Despite the orders being delivered in a very modest training hut, geospatial information systems provided impressive terrain fidelity which vividly projected the battalion scheme of manoeuvre on to a plasma screen. In this environment, OC Alpha Company extracted his key tasks and before the battalion orders were even completed was formulating his plan. The battalion orders were complete in 35 minutes, and concluded with the battalion commander and S3 quietly talking through the operation with the OC. With all the focus on Alpha Company, many of the more mechanical details had been previously explained and addressed.

The Company key tasks were:

- Destroy the enemy security post (including the medium range anti-armour weapon [MRAAW]).
- Destroy the enemy platoon main position.
- Secure the enemy position.

Due to exercise constraints the OC was given a generous amount of time to formulate his plan and deliver his orders – 16 hours in all. He did however

consult his principal fire support coordinator⁷ early for further analysis and discussion. It was assessed that he would have been ready to deliver his orders within four hours of receiving battalion orders.

Company orders

At 0930hours the following morning the OC commenced his orders. Prominent was the mud model, with coloured markers and tape.⁸ Beforehand the platoon commanders and other attached personnel familiarised themselves with the model and the OCs map. This custom of arriving early is not just a matter of punctuality but also serves as an important practice for subordinates to orientate themselves to the forthcoming mission.

The OC was clear in his orders although he occasionally drifted into language that was best understood by those schooled in higher-level operational constructs. On these occasions none of the gathered audience took notes, often content to simply listen.

The OC took 45 minutes to deliver his orders for a deliberate attack.⁹ At the conclusion he carefully summarised his plan – his design for battle, more often termed the battle-brief. What was interesting during this more intimate discussion was the absence of his notebook, and more importantly the absence of his subordinates' notebooks. It was reassuring to hear clear and plain speech at this juncture with no ambiguity.¹⁰ Furthermore, it gave the OC the opportunity to personally identify with each and every subordinate and to 'eye-ball' their understanding of his intent.

The Platoon's key tasks were:

- A platoon to destroy the enemy security post (including the MRAAW).
- Two platoons to conduct a dismounted flanking attack on the enemy main position.
- LAVs used in intimate support of dismounted infantry, in the fire support role and as a cut-off.
- Secure the enemy position (four objectives in all).

Platoon orders

Just 90 minutes after receiving his orders the observed platoon commander was prepared to deliver orders to his section and (LAV) vehicle commanders. Like his own early arrival at the OCs orders, his subordinates arrived early to familiarise themselves with the model and potential tasks. Saving time by using the OCs mud model, the platoon commander was able to concentrate on the intricacies of a dismounted attack, and securing a depth objective. The platoon commander was clear in his orders. He did not drift in to higher level operational constructs or battlefield framework rather he delivered the relevant, almost mechanical details needed to undertake a standard platoon formation assault. What emerged from these orders was the point at which the *abstract* became the more tangible – that is directed tasks such as “*2-up, 1 in depth platoon assault...on debus 1 Section assault and destroy left forward pits, 2 Section assault and destroy right forward pits. I want that medium range anti-armoured weapon destroyed*”!

The platoon commander took 40 minutes to deliver his orders and like his OC took special care to slowly walk through the plan during the battle-brief. This

was not surprising as for many in the platoon this would be the most dangerous and complex peacetime activity they would have ever undertaken, less actual combat offensive operations. A combined arms live-firing day and night deliberate attack could be considered the pinnacle of an infantry soldier's *craft*.

The Sections key tasks were:

- Destroy the left forward pits on the enemy security post.
- Destroy the right forward pits on the enemy security post (including the MRAAW).
- LAVs provide intimate fire support to dismounted infantry.
- Provide fire support to company assaulting enemy main position.
- Secure the enemy security post objective.
- Be prepared to assault subsequent objectives.

Section orders

As the commander at the *point of the spear*, the section commander was the final chain in the *vertical slice* of the orders process. 60 minutes after receiving his orders he assembled his section, prepared to deliver the essential GSMEAC information. Despite only numbering six (dismounted) soldiers the minor details, such as the seating positions for orders were not missed "...*right boys, here's the seating plan – scouts over here, 2IC here and gun-group on my right*".

The section commander's language, while more colourful than those of his superiors, was unambiguous and entirely appropriate for the task he and his soldiers would undertake.¹¹ Each soldier was left in no doubt as to what was expected of him. Clear and plain language to describe familiar battle-drills punctuated the orders. At this level well-practised SOPs were more important than being able to describe the difference between the shaping and decisive operations.

The section commander took 22 minutes to deliver his orders. A number of details were only lightly touched on and perhaps if graded by a school house instructor he may have been marked down. In this context however, after 20-plus days in the field, delivering five previous sets of orders and peaking in regards to executing SOPs, the section commander was measured and skilfully applied the key information.

The most revealing comment was related to the enemy MRAAW, the weapon that was mentioned in various forums through the three levels above the section commander. This was an essential item that must be destroyed. The section commander 'got it', that is through the layers of hierarchical orders he assessed the importance of a weapon that could disrupt the whole plan battalion plan. His analysis was perfect, encapsulated in the orders to the two scouts, "...*ok boys we are the platoon main effort to conduct the break-in... we need to provide the break-in for the platoon and the company and we need to destroy the MRAAW. Scouts... if the MRAAW is on your axis of assault you are to destroy it...basically boys it all hinges on us, the break-in for the whole company and destroying the MRAAW...*"

Further battle preparations

90 minutes after the section commander delivered his orders all dismounted infantry soldiers of Alpha Company began rehearsals. There was also a period set aside for the whole company to rehearse, however this was postponed due to an exercise safety brief. Nevertheless, the need to practice the mechanics of the attack was factored in to the overall plan. 12 hours later, after rest and last preparations, Alpha Company began its tactical move to the final rendezvous point.

In total the battalions *vertical slice* of the orders process took 22 hours. Alpha Company began its preliminary moves 16 hours later. Without the earlier exercise constraints after the initial battalion orders the often desirable one-third/ two-third rule would have been met.¹² Regardless, the battle preparations enabled the full process to be accomplished.¹³ Table 1 summarises the orders process:

Level of Orders	Key audience	Time to deliver	Next subordinates time to prepare their Orders
Battalion	Company commander and attachments	35 mins	16 hrs (Note, time prep imposed by exercise requirements. The company commander was actually ready in approx 4 hrs)
Company	Platoon commanders and attachments	45 mins	90 mins
Platoon	Section commanders	40 mins	60 mins
Section	Section members (2IC, scouts, gun-group)	22 mins	Rehearsals began 60 mins after section orders
Other information:			
1 RNZIR Battalion orders commenced 231730hrs			
Alpha Company prelim moves commenced 250730hrs			38hrs battle prep
All levels of orders were complete by 241530hrs			22hrs for the full orders process (note above)

Table 1: 1 RNZIR Deliberate Attack Orders Process

Sometimes a plan does survive first contact with the 'enemy'

As a live firing exercise there was obviously no real enemy. Instead, the company objective consisted of a hastily prepared enemy platoon position, complete with trenches, targets and a small wire obstacle. Nonetheless, the opening phase of the day attack proceeded as planned and provided the desired effect for the break-in. Somewhere on the battlefield a dismounted infantry section was assaulting its assigned pits. If the fictitious MRAAW and its crew had survived the opening artillery barrage, followed by a concentration of fire from a platoon of light armoured vehicles, and the close attention of a sniper pair then it was now the sole focus of two scouts! The security post was destroyed.

During the preparations for the assault on to the secondary objectives it became apparent that the move to the forming up point was too shallow. The problem was the distance between the two positions was further than expected. This forced the company commander, now dismounted with two of his platoons to make a decision; attack from his current location, or order his soldiers to move further west and attack in the direction as planned. He chose the latter. With minimal disruption Alpha Company moved to a new forming up point and L-Hour was adjusted.¹⁴ This modification to the plan was the only decision of any significance that the OC had to make. He was in constant contact with his platoon commanders and, leading from a forward position, had a high degree of situational awareness. The company achieved its mission in 80 minutes.

Ironically, the night attack later that evening was less eventful. With every dismounted soldier and LAV crew using night vision devices, supplemented by a heavy concentration of artillery, 84mm and 40mm illumination rounds, the company once again achieved its mission.

Mission achieved?

Overall the attacks were successful and from a subjective point of view the Company would have achieved its mission. However it would be intellectually dishonest to conclude that all training objectives were met.¹⁵ Individuals and commanders throughout the company will be aware of drills and actions that we not done correctly. The focus though should be not be on the mistakes but crucially it should be on learning from those mistakes and eliminating them in future training. This is the true mark of a professional soldier.

A comment on trained state and skill-fade is warranted. An activity such as a combined-arms live-firing deliberate day and night attack is arguably the pinnacle of peace time military land operations. It is costly in both personnel and equipment. As a result it is not an activity that is regularly practiced. The consequence is that the skills attained on Exercise Absolute will fade. Still, for a period Alpha Company can consider itself capable of transitioning to the higher, more demanding operational-level training if called to prepare for actual combat. In the crucible of war lies the ultimate test, but for now Directed Outputs have been achieved.

Concluding thoughts

The evaluation of Alpha Company presented an opportunity to examine a wider range of contemporary topics that are not often documented or open for further discourse. Some concluding thoughts therefore, in no particular order are:

- The importance of the battle-brief. There is merit in considering some sort of similar brief at the beginning of the orders.¹⁶ Everything else that follows would therefore be put in better context.

- In the age of high tech command and control systems, mud models still serve a purpose. Some of the quantitative data from the orders process however, could provide useful metrics for those charged with acquiring future command and control and decision-support tools.
- The threshold between higher conceptual military constructs and plainer, clear, mechanistic detail appears to occur at the platoon level.
- Offensive operations, that is close combat, still necessitates an infantry soldier to be prepared to 'seek out and close with the enemy, to kill or capture him.' These are 'classic war-fighting skills' and should not be degraded or regarded as obsolete.
- Warfare in the 21st Century entails kinetic and non-kinetic missions; they are not mutually exclusive. The challenge will be to try and create a training activity that simultaneously tests soldiers in the application of both missions, being reflective of the character of war as we know it today.
- New Zealand's recent assessment as the most peaceful country in the world¹⁷ reaffirms the relevance of offensive operation's training – a reminder from Vegetius's maxim "Let him who desires peace prepare for war".¹⁸
- The orders data captured from Exercise Absolute is but one source. This in itself would need to be validated against similar evaluations in order to confirm trends and recurring themes. Therefore, given the infrequency of combined-arms live-firing exercises it would be prudent to view all data and analysis in this article as an initial 'yard-stick'.

So where to now?

The intended audience for this article are junior leaders and training staff. Audio and still photographs of the actual orders that were delivered will be made available for training purposes. Please contact the author or the Regimental Sergeant Major 1 RNZIR, Warrant Office Class One Clive Douglas.

For further information on the evaluation of land operations contact the Collective Training Centre. For information on lessons learned, contact the Centre for Army Lesson's or J8 Branch Headquarters Joint Forces.

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This article represents the personal views of the author only. It does not necessarily represent the views of 1 RNZIR or the New Zealand Army.

Notes.

¹ The resources employed on the exercise included: 19 x Light Armoured Vehicles (LAV III) each armed with a 25mm cannon and 2 x 7.62mm machine guns, 70-plus dismounted infantrymen, snipers, 4 x 105mm artillery guns, small arms weapons including 84mm medium range anti-armour rocket launchers, 66mm light anti-armour rocket launchers, medium and light machine guns, claymore mines and hand grenades. Aerial observation was provided by the Army battle-lab Kahu UAV (uninhabited aerial vehicle).

² For more details on this emerging doctrine see the *New Zealand Calvary Operations, Ver 3.1* publication released November 2009.

³ It is acknowledged that some lower level doctrinal publications, such as those used by the Combat School, detail more specific processes for smaller infantry teams. However, the founding decision making tool and presentation format (GSMEAC) remains the military appreciation process (MAP). The MAP is the central decision making tool in the P86.

⁴ 'Point of the Spear' relates to an infantry corporal as described in a book of the same name written by former Sergeant Major of the New Zealand Army, Warrant Officer Class One David Hayward. See David Hayward, *Point of the Spear*, (Zenith Print, 2008).

⁵ The battalion orders were voice recorded.

⁶ Acronym for Ground, Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration and Command and Signals.

⁷ Joint Offensive Support Team, previously known as a Forward Observer.

⁸ Main page photo.

⁹ The OCs orders were voice recorded with accompanying pictures.

¹⁰ GEN James Mattis, US Joint Forces Commander is a strong advocate for 'clear language and terminology that promotes shared understanding and enables subordinates to act'. See GEN James N. Mattis, "Assessment of Effects Based Operations", *Memorandum for Joint Forces Command*, 14 August 2008, pg. 7.

¹¹ The section commander's orders were voice recorded with accompanying pictures.

¹² With concurrent activity and modern planning and command and control tools the '1/3 2/3' rule is becoming less applicable. The key condition remains the requirement for all commanders to have an understanding of the plan with appropriate time to prepare.

¹³ NZP86/2000 details generic attack timings, including battle preparation. These timings relate to the battalion and company level. No information is available for platoon or section timings. See pp. 3-3-3 and 3-3-4.

¹⁴ L-Hr is the time to commence the second phase of an operation. It is often 'on command' as the time to complete the first phase dictates L-Hr.

¹⁵ In his concluding thoughts to the Joint Operating Environment GEN Mattis stated that "there must be rigorous, honest red teaming and questioning of assumption. 'All the objectives were met' is a guarantee of intellectually dishonesty as well as a recipe for future military disaster". See USJFCOM, *The Joint Operating Environment*, 2010, p. 72.

¹⁶ Dr Milan Vego suggests the Commander's Intent be expressed before the actual mission statement. This sets the context for the subsequent orders information. The author suggests the same could be applied to the design for battle/battle brief. See Milan N. Vego, "Operational Commander's Intent", *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 57, 2nd Quarter 2010, pp. 138-144.

¹⁷ New Zealand Herald, http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10650591, accessed 8 June 2010.

¹⁸ New Zealand Defence Force, NZDDP-D, *Foundations of Military Doctrine*, New Zealand Defence Force Doctrine publication, 2008, p. 5-9.

About the author. Major Josh Wineera was invited to conduct an external evaluation of Alpha Company, 1 RNZIR during the live-firing phase of Exercise Absolute 2010. He is a former battery commander of 16 Field Regiment, RNZA and has qualified on the infantry company commander's course. Major Wineera is currently a Teaching Fellow (Tactics) at the Centre for Defence and Security Studies, Massey University. He is a former tactics instructor at the Australian Land Warfare Centre. Contact details: j.wineera@massey.ac.nz

Selection of Photographs:
1 RNZIR Orders for Alpha Company Deliberate Attack
Exercise Absolute 2010



Image 1: The OC and CSM take a closer look at the scheme of manoeuvre on a plasma screen after battalion orders



Image 2: The OC's own scheme of manoeuvre derived from the battalion orders. With advice from his principal fire support officer the OC took approx 2 hrs to come up with his outline plan



Image 3: The CO, OC and S3 discuss the upcoming attack prior to the OC delivering his company orders.



Image 4: The mud model. OC A Coy model used during his orders. The orders took 45 mins to deliver.



Image 5: The OC affirms his intent and expectations with his platoon commanders after delivering his orders.



Image 6: A platoon commander formulates his plan. 90 mins after receiving his OC's orders he delivered his own



Image 7: A platoon commander delivers his orders. He took 40mins.



Image 8: Section commander's mud model. This section was the platoon main effort – the key tasks being to achieve the break-in and destroy the enemy MRAAW.



Image 9: The section commander emphasises a key part of his plan.



Image 10: The company signallers prepare to debus from the OC's vehicle



Image 11: Decision time. The axis of assault is too shallow for attacking the second objective. The OC orders the platoons to move further west.



Image 12: Reorg. With the enemy objectives secure A Coy is ordered to reorg. The OC and his signaller take a moment to catch their breath.