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LEADERSHIP IN BATTLE COMMAND

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Abstract:

Battle Command is a leader-centered *process* rather than a staff-centered *process* that projects the mind and the will of the *commander* into the actions of the organization he or she leads. This paper examines the role of *leadership* in the *battle command* process highlighting the importance of a *leader* to the *process*. A brief analysis of a few major U.S. Army publications supported by few relevant historical examples, led to the main findings of this paper which highlights the fact that effective *decision-making* and *leadership* provide the main foundation for *battle command*. Therefore, the *commander* is central to future thinking, vision and *leadership*.

Key words: battle command, process, commander, leadership, leader, decision-making.

1. Introduction.

United States military doctrine defines Battle Command as “the art of battle decision making and leading” [1]. Roger Nye describes the command act as “more than carry out orders and apply rules and regulations to the ebb and flow of military administration. Command calls for a creative act, spawned by a carefully carved vision of one’s mission and professional values. Great commanders have the confidence and courage to interpret rules and orders, and to put their personal stamp on the decisions guiding their force...” [2]. The role of the leader and leadership is central to any military organization as proven in theory, doctrine and history.

2. Battle Command processes.

Battle Command encompasses five elements: visualize, describe, direct, assess and lead. These elements are interrelated and play different roles: the first three are processes supporting effective command and decision making, leadership is the personal input brought in by the leader and represents the driving engine while assess is the tool binding these two categories together and measuring their effectiveness through continuous evaluation.

2.1. Visualize.

Visualization is the first process of battle command and enables the commander to portray the current and future state of the organization. The process combines leader’s experience, education, knowledge with capabilities and assets available to accomplish the

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mission. The product of visualization is synthesized in commander's intent, end-state and the essential tasks the organization must accomplish to meet the intent and achieve the end-state. Action begins with a vision of the desired outcome. A leader envisions first a desired outcome, then considers the ways and means necessary to achieve it, and finally implements them into the appropriate actions according to the purpose. At every subsequent military planning step, the purpose must be the focus of effort. This product is what the commander will transfer upon the organization using the describe process. In the *blitzkrieg* days of the Second World War, General Rommel placed a strong emphasis on visualizing taking any measures that would afford him a better visual picture and thus surprising his adversaries.

2.2. Describe.

The “describe” process is the second component of battle command and enables the commander to express what the organization is to do in order to move from its current state to the visualized future state. This process merges the result of visualization in the form of intent, critical tasks and end-state with leader's ability to set goals and objectives, determine priorities and allocate resources to accomplish the mission. The key factor is effective communication which enables the commander to disseminate its visualization upon the organization in a rapid and clear way. In the Second World War, during the Battle of the Huertgen Forest, Major General Norman D. Cota failed in clearly describing to his division the conditions to meet his intent and this was in a great measure due to poor communication within his organization. The result of the failure in “describing” was that one of the U.S. Army's best and brightest commanders was defeated by enemy forces that had just spent three months retreating across France, Belgium and Holland [3].

2.3. Direct.

The “direct” process allows the commander to lead the organization's actions to achieve the visualized end-state through actions aimed at achieving the goals and objectives described in the previous process. This process is the translation into action of what the organization is to do to accomplish the mission assigned and measures the effectiveness of commander's decision making abilities. A key factor is subordinates initiative along the guidelines provided by commander's intent. General Rommel was very active in directing and, although he interfered in the minor or major tactics, he wished no man to wait for his approval.

2.4. Assessing.

Assessing represents a “tool” that allows the commander to continuously evaluate the performance of his organization through the process and provides him with feedback to adjust as necessary. During the battle at Huertgen forest, failures in properly assessing caused Major General Cota's division to be outnumbered by enemy and affected commander's ability to direct. The key factor is situational awareness and understanding because it assists the commander to visualize, describe, direct and lead effectively. General Rommel was particularly concerned with this aspect and always placed himself on the battlefield in a position that allowed him to assess the situation as it developed in order to decisively influence the battle.

2.5. Leadership.

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Visualize, describe and direct are processes that encompass art and science with respect to the organization. Leadership is the drive that brings to the battle command the “personal touch”. In an address at West Point in 1950, Field Marshall Sir William Slim noted: “If I were asked to define leadership, I should say it is the projection of personality. It is the most intensely personal thing in the world because it is just plain you.”[4]. The commander visualizes, describes and directs the organization providing purpose, direction and motivation. However, although the focus is to lead the organization to achieve its mission, the leading function goes far beyond the objective to take into account also improving the organization. It allows the commander to balance the effort between present and future with respect to the organization through its personal values, attributes, skills and actions.

Leadership is the most important element of battle command and is “influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization” [5]. There are two main schools of thought regarding leadership: authoritarian or directing, and persuading or delegating. When applied to battle command, authoritarian leadership may facilitate rapid obedience and even short-term gain but it does not encourage initiative, requires too much supervision and the subordinates can become too dependent on the leader. This style could also suffocate any teamwork spirit among subordinates. The persuasive leadership style encourages subordinates to use initiative and actively seek responsibility. This style produces long-term results influencing subordinates to become self-disciplined and independent. Leadership styles influence the battle command process as a commander’s personality and character influence his or her actions and leadership philosophy.

The current operating environment and asymmetric warfare demand adaptability to rapid and various changes and, therefore, require a mix of leadership styles which may also depend on the situation and the capabilities of subordinate commanders. Leadership plays a central role in battle command where the commander’s desired effects must be clearly understood and should encourage autonomy and freedom of action of subordinates in accordance with his or her intent.

3. Conclusion.

Although distinct, the five components of battle command are closely linked and complement each other in a continuous process, allowing the commander to lead the organization in accomplishing its mission. Battle command encompasses processes that effectively represents both the realities of command decision-making in battle and provides a practical method to an efficient organization of staff planning activities. It is a command driven process characterized by flexibility and adaptability and is carried out continuously at a “controlled speed” combining the synergetic efforts of the whole staff under effective leadership.

References:

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