
Chapter 6

Cooperating

“Unity of command (effort) is coordinated action toward a common goal; it is cooperation. It is working together by all commanders toward the accomplishment of a common mission, which is imperative for complete and final success. Commanders must develop in their staffs and subordinates the desire to cooperate, not only among themselves but with other elements of the command.”¹

—NAVMC 7386, *Tactical Principles*

“The first element of command and control is people—people who gather information, make decisions, take action, communicate, and cooperate with one another in the accomplishment of a common goal.”²

—MCDP 6, *Command and Control*

Everything that we have to do in tactics—gaining advantage and, above all, achieving a decisive result—needs a team effort. If efforts are not in harmony, results may be indecisive. For example, if the aviation combat element's actions are not harmonized with those of the ground combat element, they are unlikely to have a decisive effect. If artillery support is not well coordinated with an infantry attack, combined arms synergy will not be achieved, and the attack may fail. However, achieving this team effort is easier said than done. It requires rapidly maneuvering forces, often widely dispersed, to work together under the most adverse conditions.

CONTROL IN COMBAT

Because war is characterized by chaos, uncertainty, and rapid change, control quickly breaks down. It is probably a mistake to speak of control in combat. MCDP 6 states that “given the nature of war, it is a delusion to think that we can be in control with any sort of certitude or precision.”³ As anyone who has experienced combat will undoubtedly agree, it is impossible to control everything. Attempts to impose control also can easily undermine the initiative upon which Marine Corps tactics depends. Marines can become hesitant; they may feel they must wait for orders before acting. We are not likely to move faster or gain leverage over a competent opponent unless Marines at every level exercise initiative.

The dilemma, then, is this: How do we achieve the goal of working together in harmony while exercising a more decentralized type of control?

COOPERATION

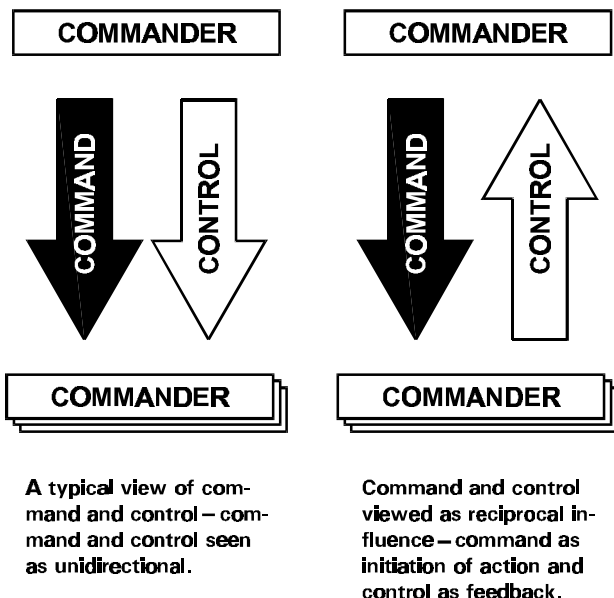
The beginning of the answer lies in *cooperation*. We define cooperation as the union of self-discipline and initiative in pursuit of a common goal. Cooperation can be viewed as a component of control.

Control can generally be divided into two types: centralized and decentralized. Centralized control tends to be in one direction and works from the top down: someone at a higher level determines what subordinates will and will not do. Centralized control makes us conform to higher dictates because only one person does the thinking for the organization—the person in control.

In contrast, decentralized control works from the bottom up. Command is the exercise of authority and guidance, and control is felt as feedback about the effects of the action taken because thinking is required at all levels. (See figure.) This feedback allows the commander to adapt to changing circumstances and to command subsequent action. Cooperation is

required in decentralized control. Subordinates work together laterally and from the bottom up to accomplish tasks that fulfill the commander's intent. Cooperation means we take the initiative to help those around us accomplish our shared mission.⁴

Cooperation is essential to Marine Corps tactics. The flight leader and wingman work on the basis of cooperation. These pilots cooperate with the infantry they support. Two infantry units, fighting side by side, cooperate. A mobile combat service



Two views of the relationship between command and control.

support detachment and the mechanized force it supports cooperate. We all work together far more effectively when we communicate laterally than when we communicate only through higher headquarters and respond only to centralized direction. As an ancillary benefit, we relieve our overloaded communications networks.

The history of tactics is filled with examples where cooperation made the difference—and control could not. One such example occurred during an Iraqi counterattack in Operation Desert Storm. Black smoke from burning oil wells turned the day into night. A UH-1N Huey pilot used his night vision equipment to lead flights of AH-1W Cobras through near-zero visibility to attack Iraqi armored vehicles. The specially equipped Huey designated targets so that the Cobras could engage them at near pointblank range with antiarmor Hellfire missiles. For nearly 10 hours, the Huey pilot led flight after flight into the pitched battle, earning the Navy Cross for heroism.⁵

The pilots worked together to destroy targets the Huey could not engage and the Cobra could not see. This example shows what cooperation can accomplish.

DISCIPLINE

Cooperation can harmonize efforts and get everyone to work together without the centralized control that undermines initiative. However, it raises a more fundamental question: How do we prepare people to cooperate when the going gets tough?

The answer is discipline. “There is only one kind of discipline—PERFECT DISCIPLINE. If you do not enforce and maintain discipline, you are potential murderers.”⁶ In the face of adversity and difficulty, discipline enables individuals to pursue what is best for those around them, their unit, and the Marine Corps. Individuals and units might have the desire, but without discipline they will be unable to accomplish the most difficult tasks in combat—operating faster than the enemy, gaining advantage, generating decisive force, and achieving decisive results.

In combat, instant obedience to orders is crucial. Orders may not be popular, but there comes a point where they must be carried out without question. Discipline is a result of training. In training for war, discipline should be firm, but fair. The Marine Corps is known as a highly disciplined fighting force. Discipline is one of the strengths that make Marines equally effective assaulting a beach, conducting a noncombatant evacuation operation, fighting a fire, or guarding our embassies. Nonetheless, discipline is founded not only on obedience but also on a sense of duty.

The discipline needed for cooperation comes from two sources: imposed discipline and self-discipline. The first source, imposed discipline, is more often associated with the term “military discipline.” Imposed discipline, typified by the Prussian approach, is characterized by instant obedience to orders. External in nature, it ensures compliance with established procedures, rules, or guidance and direction from above. It is a means to achieve efficiency in accomplishment of routine duties or drills. In its most extreme form, it can be rigid, paralyzing, and destructive of initiative. Imposed discipline also may make units vulnerable to the effects of chaos and uncertainty and unable to cooperate with one another.

Self-discipline is an internal force that morally obligates all Marines to do what they know is right—in this case, to cooperate with every other Marine in the pursuit of a common goal. The obligation is internal in each individual; it is something he or she feels powerfully about. Coupled with a sense of camaraderie and esprit de corps, it pulls from within and causes Marines to do everything they can for fellow Marines. At the unit level, this force can be felt as morale. “No system of tactics can lead to victory when the morale of an army is bad.”⁷

Self-discipline can be seen in successful athletic teams as well as military units. Team players instinctively back up their teammates. In baseball, the outfielders cover each other on flyballs. In hockey, rarely does only one player rush the goal. In football, offensive linemen do not stand by idly on a pass play

if no defensive player faces them. They block the first defender they can find. Members of squads and fire teams also work together as teams to accomplish tasks and take care of each other. This cooperation among teammates cannot be enforced by a coach or leader. It depends upon the self-discipline of the individuals.

Marine discipline is the self-discipline of a successful team, not just the imposed discipline of the army of Frederick the Great. For Marines, military discipline means accepting personal responsibility. Self-discipline will not allow us to shirk responsibility or blame others. A discipline failure—often a failure to act—is a personal failure.

Our form of discipline is also *absolute*. There is no time off. Someone else may be in charge, but that does not absolve us from the responsibility to do everything we can to achieve the common goal. It does not reduce our responsibility to cooperate with fellow Marines in our unit and beyond.

This discipline is a mindset, *a way of thinking and behaving*. It runs through everything that we do. It is as much a part of garrison life as of combat. We also carry this sense of personal responsibility and duty to contribute into our private lives. We see it whenever off-duty Marines take the initiative to help at the scene of an accident, act as leaders in their communities, or in other ways do more than their share. They do so because of something inward, not because they are compelled

by control. That something is self-discipline, and it is not limited to one aspect of life.

CONCLUSION

Modern tactics relies on cooperation. Cooperation, in turn, depends on discipline. Discipline consists of both imposed discipline and self-discipline. As leaders of Marines, we must create a climate in which self-discipline and a high level of initiative can flourish within the boundaries of military discipline. This climate depends on us. Words are easy; anyone can give an occasional pep talk on the merits of self-discipline. Marines judge actions, not words, and respond positively to leadership by example. If the leader creates a climate where perfect discipline is expected and demonstrated, cooperation will follow.