

# A Little Bit Joint—

## Component Commands: Seams, Not Synergy

By C. P. ANKERSEN

**J**oint warfare is not just the wave of the future; it is the way warfighting must be conceived, planned, and conducted across the conflict spectrum today. Several seemingly positive steps have been taken to integrate military operations within the U.S. Armed Forces since the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986. At first blush there are encouraging signs: the Joint Staff is developing doctrine publications and the Joint Chiefs are advocating the need for each of their services to be more joint.

What then are the unsettled concerns in the joint world? One is command and control. The

document that is meant to deal with it, Joint Pub 3-56, *Command and Control Doctrine for Joint Operations*, has been languishing since 1991. Why the delay? Certainly if marked improvements have been made in areas such as targeting and intelligence collection, the question of command and control should certainly be solved.

One reason that this pub has not appeared is disagreement over component commands. For instance, airmen argue that component commands should always be included while marines worry that unique capabilities would be subsumed under a component commander who most likely would be a soldier. The issue of component command must be resolved to realize true jointness.

But the notion of component command is a red herring. No matter how it is defined, it will never be more than an intermediate step in the joint equation. Far from expanding jointness, it is

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**Captain C.P. Ankersen, Canadian Forces, is a post-graduate at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and has served with Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.**

divisive. To fully explore the concept, one must examine the stated goal and underlying principles of joint warfare. Jointness is ailing and the component command is one of the symptoms.

### One Plus One Equals Three

Jointness is not a new concept. Some form of interservice cooperation has existed at least since Wellington's day. Two reasons are synergy and streamlining. As stated in *Unified Action Armed Forces*, "The ability to integrate and exploit the various capabilities of a joint force can disorient an enemy who is weak in one or more dimensions of warfare." The crux of the matter is that joint forces can do more than any one service alone. Synergy, as defined in Joint Pub 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, is achieved when a force can integrate and synchronize operations in a

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manner that applies force from different dimensions to shock, disrupt, and defeat enemies. It is essential to the operational art in that it "enables JFCs [joint force commanders] to project focused capabilities that present no seams or vulnerabilities to an enemy to exploit."

This powerful idea is economical in an age of budget cutbacks. Rather than having several services competing for scarce resources across the spectrum of defense requirements, jointness can reduce duplication, a major theme underlying the enactment of the Goldwater-Nichols legislation. Synergy and streamlining are based on principles that apply to joint warfare. Joint Pub 3-0 states "the central philosophy necessary for successful operations [is] unity of effort—common action throughout the joint force in pursuit of common objectives."

Half Measures

These goals suggest that joint warfare can be efficient and singular in purpose. This may be true in the abstract, but the nature of joint organization may not enable us to get there from here. Jointness is incomplete because it is not holistically designed.<sup>1</sup> It was, as may at first seem logical, built from the bottom up. That is a fatal flaw. Joint warfare is synergistic—larger than the sum of its parts. Thus the concept must be designed from the top down as a goal. Service capabilities are considered in the design, but the end-state must be envisioned as a concept unto itself.

Today joint theory is predicated on service thinking and not vice versa. Just as Orville and Wilbur Wright could not have imagined commercial aviation in the 1990s, it may be impossible for individual services to envision the eventual goal of jointness from the bottom up. Seen from

that perspective, the most that can be anticipated is an elaborate form of interservice cooperation. But this is not jointness. Nor is it simply shifting gears up one notch. Jointness is a metamorphosis, a synthesis of ideas that radically alters the way everything associated with it is to be viewed.

One indication of the lack of a joint vision is found in current thinking about intermediary commanders who, in representing their services, are seen as a desirable (and in all but exceptional instances a necessary) element of jointness. Joint Pub 1, *Joint Warfare of the U.S. Armed Forces*, goes so far as to say that "in joint matters, reliance is first upon component commanders and staffs as the true experts."

Can a "higher plane" of jointness succeed if hobbled by its constituent parts? One author has asserted that "the most precarious aspect about what now passes for joint doctrine is that it was compiled by diligently polling the usual sources—the services and other affected parties."<sup>2</sup> How does this occur? The Joint Chiefs are at the pinnacle of the military profession, well educated, and on cutting edge of doctrine and its application. Yet they suffer because individual service needs are not entirely complementary from either a service or an interservice (but not truly joint) perspective. As two service chiefs related in the pages of *JFQ*, "what may be optimum for one component can come at the expense of others—by decreasing combat power or increasing risk."<sup>3</sup>

This fact that what is good for the goose may not be good for the gander has caused interservice rivalry all over the world ever since multiple services came into being. Little has changed from the inception of modern cooperation. The British foray into what was described as combined operations during World War II was plagued by traditional chauvinist thinking: "Navy, army, and air force had been trained for generations to survey each other with suspicion and be on their guard against any encroachments on their prerogatives."<sup>4</sup> This is clear in the incomplete way in which joint matters are viewed. Rather than being cumulative, any gains attributed to joint forces are seen as distributive. Thus the leaders of the Army and Air Force agree to disagree, "regardless of how complementary our views on joint operations might be, specific responsibilities produce legitimate differences between component commanders."<sup>5</sup> Jointness is judged by how far it advances service aims. In this century of airpower, nuclear missile forces, air defense, space operations, and theater missile defense, the services instinctively look out for number one when it comes to budgets.

65<sup>th</sup> Signal Company (Alan Mitchell)

Mortar drill in Bosnia during Joint Guard.

Despite this rivalry the services supposedly collaborate in developing lucid, seamless joint doctrine. Together with the competition for resources, the services are averse to losing their best and brightest. Thinking distributively, they still fear a brain drain, that assigning a good officer to a joint billet will result in “a corresponding decline in the overall quality of service headquarters and operational staffs.”<sup>6</sup> This mentality suggests that jointness may never be fully realized.

### Components: Part of the Problem

Owing to an immature concept of jointness, several limiting factors have been incorporated into the conduct of joint matters. One integral

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brake on the joint train is the idea of components and, more importantly, component commanders within a joint force.

Far from acting as facilitators they are at best an intermediate phenomenon and at worst an obstacle to synergy. They go against the principles of joint warfare discussed above. Component commanders diminish the synergy of joint forces, causing one plus one to total a disappointing two (or even one and a half) instead of something more. They are not streamlined; on the contrary, they are a drag on the joint fuselage. They are not seamless; they are in fact the seams themselves, the weak links in the joint chain.

The concept of synergy bears deeper investigation. The term itself connotes some degree of energy as well as compound capability. In the realm of military affairs it has been applied to another collective endeavor, combined arms. It is instructive to compare the concept of jointness with combined arms theory because both rely on synergy to realize their potential. Combined arms attain synergy in two ways. The “complementary principle states that by combining the various [military services] into single organizations (that is, functioning under one commander), we can compensate for each other arm’s weakness through another arm’s strength. . . . In such a manner, each arm serves to complement the others.”<sup>7</sup> Thus the Navy makes up for the shortage of strategic mobility by transporting land forces across the sea, Army dominance of the rear area meets the Air Force need to operate airpower from secure bases, and so forth. The dilemma principle states that “when employed correctly, the various [military services] . . . complement each other with respect to [an] enemy. In other words, in order for [an] enemy to successfully defend himself from one, he must become vulnerable to another.” Joint warfighting, like combined arms warfare, presents a multitude of problems to an enemy, forcing it to make impossible choices involving simultaneous, coordinated operation. While designed to describe combined arms theory, the concept of synergy embraces the goal of “project focused capabilities that present no seams” as previously discussed.

The glue that binds such capabilities is trust—in both doctrine and the other services. Trust begins with understanding the commander’s intent, for if one is not sure of one’s own purpose it is unlikely one will believe anyone else has a purpose firmly in mind. Trust in other services only can arise from sound joint strategy and holistically developed doctrine. It becomes easier with the mastery of core capabilities as a starting point but can be fully achieved solely through experience. Jointness is only maximized when synergy, and thus trust, is present (see figure 1).

Component commands do not foster trust. The concept itself is born of service rivalry and perceived needs to guard service requirements, capabilities, and traditions. Component commands do not increase jointness; rather they segregate forces back into single service-oriented groupings. All the advantages realized by combining various forces under a single commander are tempered by jealously reapportioning forces to component commanders. A truly joint force would likely have only one commander, a joint one. The joint force with the least degree of jointness has several extra layers of command, most of which are uni-service. (Figure 2 shows the correlation between jointness

Figure 1. Elements of Synergy

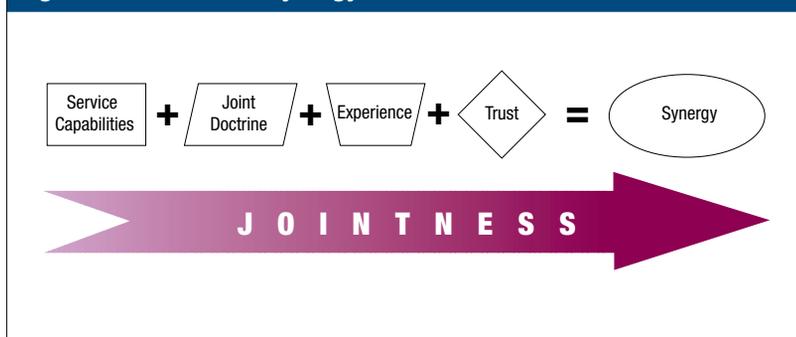
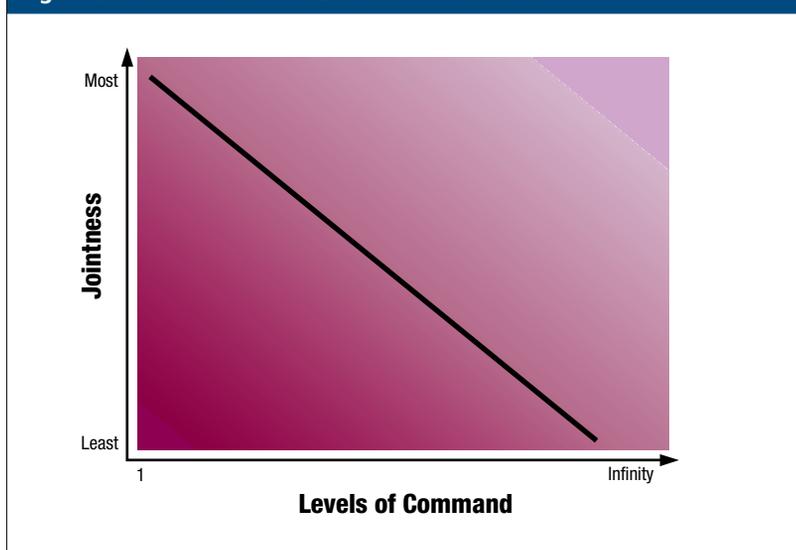


Figure 2. Jointness versus Levels of Command



and levels of command.) Span of control is the continuum that bridges these two poles. Obviously, the former force command would have an unrealistic span. As Joint Pub 1 asserts, “decentralized execution is essential because no one commander can control the detailed actions of a large number of units or individuals.” However, single-service components are introduced under the guise of reducing span of control. In effect, while the span is decreased so is jointness.

Current joint doctrine, while emphasizing component commands, allows for their absence in certain circumstances. Even that it does halfway. Instead of saying that joint forces may operate without component commanders it takes the intermediate step: a “[joint task force] commander may also be a service component commander.”<sup>8</sup> Some nations employ a more joint

command process. For example, Canada has a direct method of joint command, whereby command is exercised from joint commander to subordinate joint commander, or to a single service force organized in a normal operational format. This system has no components and thus no component commanders. Unity of effort is much more easily achieved.<sup>9</sup> This begs the question of whether joint forces can always operate without component commanders.

The first rudiment warfare is applying the principles of war. Examining how component command relates to them gives insight into its merit.

*Economy of force:* Joint warfare without components may reduce unnecessary redundancy, thereby maximizing the return on effort and resources expended.

*Unity of command.* The absence of component commanders improves unity of command by avoiding the dilution of the joint commander’s intent by service interpretations.

*Simplicity.* Components add an unnecessary level of command, leading to problems in command and control, such as in communications.

The goals outlined in Joint Pub 1 furnish further proof of the negative effects of component command. With unity of effort, common doctrine, and interoperability they emphasize “centralized direction and decentralized execution.” Introducing component commands to joint organizations militates against those stated goals. It decentralizes direction by putting component commanders in a position to interpret and puts a service spin on the intent of joint force commanders. In addition, it also centralizes execution by inserting a layer of command between the planning and executive levels. In simple terms, JFCs make plans and give orders for joint action. The order is taken by component commanders and translated into service specific direction. Next, perhaps in an altered form, it is executed by operational formations or units of each component. A similar phenomenon of redundancy is found in both German and Soviet deep operations theory. As Richard Simpkin noted, however, “not more than two headquarters . . . are immediately critical to the course of the operation at any one time.”<sup>10</sup> This held true even when the headquarters were separated by one or more levels of command. In German orders “tasking two levels down . . . was in fact necessary to give the operation coherence.” Even in a single service there are times when levels of command obstructs the most efficient execution of a mission. Simpkin adds, “the planning and controlling operational headquarters, say army, sets the tasks for the highest tactical formation (division). The role of corps . . . is to help divisions carry out these tasks, and to direct

them in the sense of the army commander's intention as the operation develops." A closer look at the real role of this corps headquarters reveals that it is actually no longer commanding but acting more in a staff capacity. In joint theory, the component commands are analogous to corps command in this example.

**To Command or Not To Command**

Joint Pub 3-0 describes the responsibilities of component commanders thus:

- making recommendations to JFCs on proper employment of component forces
- accomplishing assigned operational missions
- selecting and nominating specific units of the parent service component to subordinate forces.

Such responsibilities may not only be carried out by commanders but also, and perhaps even more properly, by staff officers. An advisory role

best fits the component commanders. The joint force land component commander, for example, is seen as "responsible to the establishing commander for making recommendations on the proper employment of land

forces, planning and coordinating land operations, or accomplishing such missions as may be assigned."<sup>11</sup> Commanders take action; staff officers recommend, plan, and coordinate. Staff officers inject specialized knowledge into the planning

process. If there are considerations JFCs should be aware of vis-à-vis individual service capabilities, staff officers may voice them as effectively as commanders without adding extra layers of command. Proponents of component command maintain that joint logistics and administration are too difficult to undertake and that services must support their components. (Regardless of how cumbersome logistics becomes, the tail should not wag the dog. Again a staff solution seems appropriate.)

Despite stereotypes, staff officers need not be meek sycophants or bean counters. Properly trained and employed, they help commanders create and execute plans. As Simpkin noted, "One of the staff's roles in executing the commander's will is to interact vigorously with him in shaping that will. This is teamwork at its highest."<sup>12</sup> Service advisors on staffs can help JFCs just as well as component commanders in the chain of command and take the place of component commanders in operations and administration branches (figure 3). By providing service specific considerations to joint commanders, joint staffs permit the exercise of direct command and facilitate the dual aims of centralized direction and decentralized execution.

An imperfect compromise between the options open to staffs and component commanders is dual hating an operational commander as a component commander. But this is an intermediate solution that ignores the seamless ideal of joint operations. It places an even greater burden on the chain of command by putting the onus on operational commanders to fight their own force as well as keep a finger in their superior commander's decision-making process, injecting service concerns as appropriate. Like most compromises, it falls short of providing a real solution.

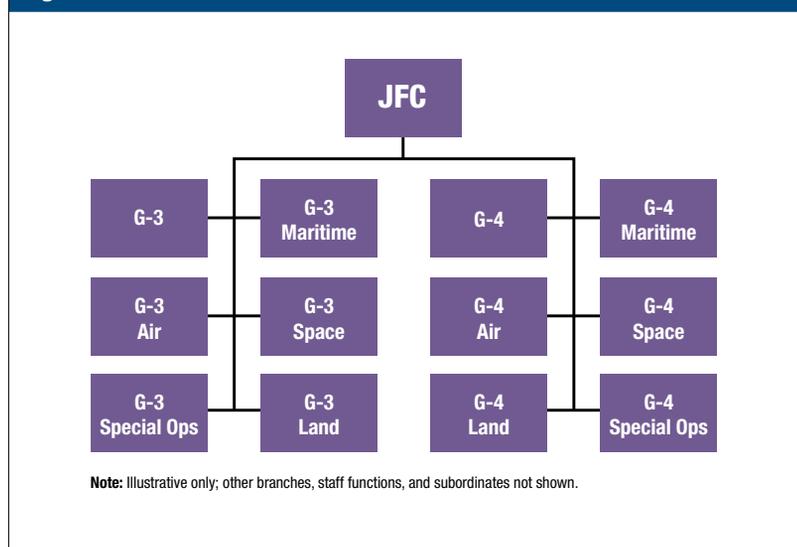
How can joint commanders exercise direct command over operational commanders without the intervening level of component command? The answer is directive control. As Joint Pub 3-0 states, "JFCs issue prioritized mission-type orders to subordinate commanders . . . with receipt of the mission goes the authority and responsibility to conduct operations in accordance with the superior commander's intent and concept of operations." As General Shalikashvili went to great pains to

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Carrier air wing, Southern Watch.



Figure 3. Staff Functions vice Subordinate Commanders



explain, "Joint force commanders should scrupulously avoid overly detailed management and direction. Simple orders with the intent of the commander clearly articulated comprise the best basis for clear and effective communications between and among all elements of the joint force."<sup>13</sup> With directive control, the need for component commanders to pass orders from JFCs obviously becomes redundant. By sticking to concepts of operations rather than intricate details, the need for joint commanders to be experts in every aspect of the forces under them diminishes. This is made even more effective by the sound advice of staff officers before directives are issued.

Commanding joint forces is a daunting task. As two former service chiefs have observed, "One lifetime is barely sufficient to master every skill needed to fight and lead in one medium of war. Learning to fight jointly in three is a tough business. . . ." <sup>14</sup> Directive control can help but cannot offer all the answers. The key to joint command is perspective. Just as the Wright brothers did not foresee the intricacies of air traffic control, single-service oriented officers cannot envision genuine jointness. The promise lies in training, education, and experience, and it is taking root in today's junior officers. There increasingly exists "a new culture among the leaders of the Armed Forces . . . truly joint . . . evidenced in the experiences of officers who have been educated and served in joint billets."<sup>15</sup> With the advent of a joint officer corps, the vestiges of half-joint thinking will fade. Service rivalry will be eclipsed by a realization that jointness is desirable and achievable. Eventually, service doctrine will evolve from joint doctrine,

not the other way around. Moreover, true jointness will occur when doctrine is developed by jointly educated officers who can advise on service issues, and then executed directly by operational commanders. How rapidly this objective is realized will depend upon our skill in paving the way. A change in perspective today will make all the difference tomorrow.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Michael C. Vitale, "Joint by Design, Not Accident," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 9 (Autumn 1995), p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> C. Kenneth Allard, "Lessons Unlearned: Somalia and Joint Doctrine," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 9 (Autumn 1995), p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> Dennis J. Reimer and Ronald R. Fogleman, "Joint Warfare and the Army-Air Force Team," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 11 (Spring 1996), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Phillip Ziegler, *Mountbatten* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 165.

<sup>5</sup> Reimer and Fogleman, "Joint Warfare," p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Howard D. Graves and Don M. Snider, "Emergence of the Joint Officer," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 13 (Autumn 1996), p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> See Robert Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 1991), pp. 92-94. The author makes no reference to joint operations.

<sup>8</sup> Joint Pub 1, *Joint Warfare of the U.S. Armed Forces*, chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> Canada provides for component command in its system of command.

<sup>10</sup> Richard E. Simpkin, *Race to the Swift* (London: Brassey's, 1985), pp. 203, 233, 263. Simpkin studied only land operations when making this discovery. See also Shane B. Schreiber, *Shock Army of the British Empire* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997), for a World War I example.

<sup>11</sup> Joint Pub 3-0. Other listed component commander responsibilities are similar in scope.

<sup>12</sup> Simpkin, *Race*, p. 263.

<sup>13</sup> John M. Shalikhshvili, "A Word from the Chairman," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 13 (Autumn 1996), p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> For opposing views on dual hatting, see Reimer and Fogleman, "Joint Warfare," p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> For a thorough look at joint developments in professional military education, see Graves and Snider, "Emergence," p. 54.

## Joint Force Quarterly Essay Contest on

# Military

# INNOVATION

To stimulate innovative thinking on how the Armed Forces can remain on the cutting edge of warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *Joint Force Quarterly* is pleased to announce the 1998–99 “Essay Contest on Military Innovation” sponsored by the National Defense University Foundation, Inc. The contest solicits contributions on exploiting technological advances in warfighting as well as on the development of new operational concepts and organizational structures. Essays may be based on either historical analyses of military breakthroughs or contemporary trends in the conduct of war.

### Contest Prizes

Winners will be awarded prizes of \$2,500 and \$1,500 for the two best essays. In addition, a prize of \$1,000 will be presented for the best essay submitted by an officer in the rank of major/lieutenant commander or below (or equivalent grades), regardless of nationality.

### Contest Rules

1. Entrants may be military personnel or civilians (from the public or the private sector) and of any nationality. Essays written by individual authors or groups of authors are eligible.
2. Entries must be original in nature and not previously published (nor under consideration for publication elsewhere). Essays derived from work carried out at intermediate and senior colleges (staff and war colleges), universities, and other educational institutions are eligible.
3. Entries must not exceed 5,000 words in length and must be submitted typewritten, double-spaced, and in triplicate (no electronically transmitted contributions will be accepted). They should include a wordcount at the end. Documentation may follow any standard form of citation, but endnotes rather than footnotes are preferred.

4. Entries must be submitted with (a) a letter indicating the essay is a contest entry together with the author's name, social security account number (or passport number in the case of non-U.S. entrants), mailing address, daytime telephone number, and FAX number (if available); (b) a cover sheet containing the contestant's full name and essay title; (c) a summary of the essay which is no more than 100 words; and (d) a biographical sketch of the author. Neither the names of authors nor any personal references to the identity of the contributors should appear in the body of the essays (including running heads or other distinguishing markings such as office symbols).

5. Entries should be mailed to: Essay Contest, ATTN: NDU–NSS–JFQ, 300 Fifth Avenue (Bldg. 62), Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, D.C. 20319–5066.

6. All entries must be postmarked no later than June 30, 1999 to be considered eligible.

7. *Joint Force Quarterly* will hold first right to publish all entries. The prize-winning as well as other essays submitted in the contest may appear in future issues of the journal.

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