

MCDP 6

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# Command and Control

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U.S. Marine Corps

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DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
Headquarters United States Marine Corps  
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FOREWORD

This doctrinal publication describes a theory and philosophy of command and control for the U.S. Marine Corps. Put very simply, the intent is to describe how we can reach effective military decisions and implement effective military actions faster than an adversary in any conflict setting on any scale. In so doing, this publication provides a framework for all Marines for the development and exercise of effective command and control in peace, in crisis, or in war. This publication represents a firm commitment by the Marine Corps to a bold, even fundamental shift in the way we will view and deal with the dynamic challenges of command and control in the information age.

The Marine Corps' view of command and control is based on our common understanding of the nature of war and on our warfighting philosophy, as described in Fleet Marine Force Manual 1, *Warfighting* (to be superseded by Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, *Warfighting*). It takes into account both the timeless features of war as we understand them and the implications of the ongoing information explosion that is a consequence of modern technology. Since war is fundamentally

a clash between independent, hostile wills, our doctrine for command and control accounts for animate enemies actively interfering with our plans and actions to further their own aims. Since we recognize the turbulent nature of war, our doctrine provides for fast, flexible, and decisive action in a complex environment characterized by friction, uncertainty, fluidity, and rapid change. Since we recognize that equipment is but a means to an end and not the end itself, our doctrine is independent of any particular technology. Taking a broad view that accounts first for the human factors central in war, this doctrine provides a proper framework for designing, appraising, and deploying hardware as well as other components of command and control support.

This doctrinal publication applies across the full range of military actions from humanitarian assistance on one extreme to general war on the other. It applies equally to small-unit leaders and senior commanders. Moreover, since any activity not directly a part of warfighting is part of the preparation for war, this doctrinal publication is meant to apply also to the conduct of peacetime activities in garrison as well as in the field.

This publication provides the authority for the subsequent development of command and control doctrine, education, training, equipment, facilities, procedures, and organization. This doctrinal publication provides no specific techniques or procedures for command and control; rather, it provides broad guidance which requires judgment in application. Other

publications in the command and control series will provide specific tactics, techniques, and procedures for performing various tasks. MCDP 5, *Planning*, discusses the planning side of command and control more specifically.

“Operation VERBAL IMAGE,” the short story with which this publication begins, offers a word picture of command and control in action (done well and done poorly) and illustrates various key points that appear in the text. It can be read separately or in conjunction with the rest of the text. Chapter 1 works from the assumption that, in order to develop an effective philosophy of command and control, we must first come to a realistic appreciation for the nature of the process and its related problems and opportunities. Based on this understanding, chapter 2 discusses theories of command and control, looking at the subject from various aspects, such as leadership, information management, and decisionmaking. Building on the conclusions of the preceding chapters, chapter 3 describes the basic features of the Marine Corps’ approach to command and control.

A main point of this doctrinal publication is that command and control is not the exclusive province of senior commanders and staffs: effective command and control is the responsibility of all Marines. And so this publication is meant to guide Marines at all levels of command.

C. C. KRULAK  
General, U.S. Marine Corps  
Commandant of the Marine Corps

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# Command and Control

## Operation VERBAL IMAGE

### Chapter 1. The Nature of Command and Control

How Important is Command and Control? — What is Command and Control? — What is the Basis of Command and Control? — What is the Relationship Between “Command” and “Control”? — What Does it Mean to be “In Control”? — Complexity in Command and Control — What Makes Up Command and Control? — What Does Command and Control Do? — The Environment of Command and Control: Uncertainty and Time — Command and Control in the Information Age — Conclusion

### Chapter 2. Command and Control Theory

Point of Departure: The OODA Loop — The Information Hierarchy — Image Theory — The Command and Control Spectrum — Leadership Theory — Planning Theory — Organization Theory — Communications Theory — Information Management Theory — Decisionmaking Theory — Conclusion

### **Chapter 3. Creating Effective Command and Control**

The Challenges to the System — Mission Command and Control — Low-Level Initiative — Commander's Intent — Mutual Trust — Implicit Understanding and Communication — Decisionmaking — Information Management — Leadership — Planning — Focusing Command and Control — The Command and Control Support Structure — Training, Education, and Doctrine — Procedures — Manpower — Organization — Equipment and Technology — Conclusion

#### **Notes**

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# Operation VERBAL IM- AGE

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**Scene:** A troubled corner of the globe, sometime in the near future. The Marine expeditionary force prepares for an upcoming offensive.

**2248 Monday:** Maj John Gustafson had taken over as the regimental intelligence officer just in time for Operation VERBAL IMAGE. *Who thinks up the names for these operations anyway?* he wondered. This would be his first command briefing and he wanted to make a good impression. The colonel had a reputation for being a tough, no-nonsense boss—and the best regimental commander in the division. Gustafson would be thorough and by-the-numbers. He would have all the pertinent reports on hand, pages of printouts containing any piece of data the regimental commander could possibly want. He went over his briefing in his mind as he walked with his stack of reports through the driving rain to the command tent.

The colonel arrived, just back from visiting his forward battalions and soaking wet, and said, “All right, let’s get started. S-2, you’re up.”

Gustafson cleared his throat and began. He had barely gotten through the expected precipitation when the colonel held up his hand as a signal to stop. Gustafson noticed the other staff officers smiling knowingly.

“Listen, S-2,” the colonel said, “I don’t care about how many inches of rainfall to expect. I don’t care about the percentage of lunar illumination. I don’t want lots of facts and figures. Number one, I don’t have time, and number two, they don’t do me any good. What I need is to know what it all *means*. Can the Cobras fly in this stuff or not? Will my tanks get bogged down in this mud? Don’t read me lists of enemy spottings; tell me what the enemy’s up to. Get inside his head. You don’t have to impress me with how much data you can collect; I know you’re a smart guy, S-2. But I don’t deal in data; I deal in pictures. Paint me a picture, got it?”

“Don’t worry about it, major,” the regimental executive officer said later, clapping a hand on Gustafson’s shoulder. “We’ve all been through it.”

**0615 Tuesday:** The operation was getting underway. In his battalion command post, LtCol Dan Hewson observed with satisfaction as his units moved out toward their appointed objectives. He watched the progress on the computer screen before him. Depicted on the 19-inch flat screen was a color map of the battalion zone of action. The map was covered with