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INTERMEDIATE OPERATIONAL COMMANDERS
A ROLE FOR NAVAL DESTROYER SQUADRON COMMANDERS

by

Michael J. Sweeney
Commander, United States Navy

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

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Paper directed by
Captain G.W. Jackson
Chairman, Joint Military Operations Department

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CDR L. Walt Wildemann
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15. Abstract: Advances in Information Technology (IT) systems and decision aids offer increased speed of command in warfare. What effect does IT have on the authority of intermediate operational commanders such as Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) Commanders in the US Navy? Intermediate commanders remain vital to manage the "how" to complete the operational scheme of Joint Force Commanders (JFC) despite the increased availability of shared information. DESRON Commanders' traditional and current roles offer leadership experience to provide intuitive decision making and prepare the battlefield in maritime service applications and joint operations.			
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As foreign garrisons are reduced, overseas bases abandoned, allies urged to cultivate the virtues of self-reliance, the diplomatic and political functions of the US Navy may actually expand: those grey, restless, innumerable ships will console Americans and reassure their friends; they will constitute the universal, the flexible, [and] the removable reminder of American power and concern.¹

James Cable, Gunboat Diplomacy

Introduction

Information Technology (IT) is commonly hailed as a “revolution in military affairs” that must be harnessed to maintain strategic superiority. Advances in battlefield systems, tactical decision aids, and information networks reduce force structures required for engagement. Technology brings military forces to the threshold of leaving behind the massive build up of combat arms required in modern warfare. Operation Desert Storm stood as the swan song of 20th century conflict as well as the precursor to our nation’s military strategy for the next millennium. America’s ability to dominate an opponent across a range of military operations begins with free lines of communication reaching close to the territorial limits of most sovereign nations. Highly maneuverable modern forces with precision munitions translate to decreased demand for fuel, parts, and subsistence requirements. The smaller force structure and reduced footprints of support required to sustain combat power lead to a “right sized” continental based U.S. military. Does reduced force structure apply to the characteristics of the operational chain of command as well?

Advances in information systems and decision aids threaten the role of intermediate commanders because they may be bypassed in the speed of command. If or when equipped with the necessary technical capability, Joint Force Commanders (JFC) and even higher echelons appear ready to bypass many operational command levels.

Information Technology for the 21st Century (IT-21) consists of systems that accurately provide the necessary high levels of understanding of the battlespace--the sensors--and systems that link the ships and aircraft together--the shooters--for networked tactical engagements. Intermediate level commanders are searching for a defined role in centralized control and decentralized execution of assigned missions in the IT revolution. However, this paper seeks to prove that command and control of reduced operational assets to complete assigned objectives is an area where intermediate commanders remain vital to manage the "how" to complete the operational scheme of the JFC despite the increased availability of shared information.

Navy Destroyer Squadron Operational Commanders

Intermediate operational commanders direct their unique service combat capabilities in joint operations all the while gaining the experience to eventually command JTFs. U.S. naval component commanders are key figures in many global locations with flexible, removable, and highly maneuverable forces. Naval Component Commanders (NCC) for a unified CINC are usually a Fleet Commander or higher ranking flag officer. As an intermediate operational leader, Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) Commanders are well suited as naval component commanders for a variety of joint force organizations tailored for specified operations conducted in a CINC's theater.

Commander, DESRONs (COMDESRONs) are naval operational commanders that can serve with a Carrier Battle Group (CVBG) and Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), or remain on their own in a theater when CVBG or ARG commanders are tasked

with diverting their forces to another location. CVBGs and ARGs cannot maintain a constant presence in every regional location. The Commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe reported that in a twelve month period during 1996-1997, his naval forces participated in thirteen joint and combined operations involving peacekeeping, peace enforcement, noncombatant evacuation, and humanitarian missions.² COMDESRON (CDS) are available to unified CINCs and their service components to fill the role as intermediate operational commanders.

DESRON organizations can conduct a range of operations as a capable intermediate commander for 21st Century force structures regardless of the level of IT. COMDESRONs offer leadership experience necessary for intuitive decision making and preparing the battlefield for naval service applications as well as joint operations. COMDESRONs operate with a small command element that can function from different platforms and conduct numerous missions. CDS have a tradition of employing a variety of naval forces to compliment their range of operational capabilities to achieve mission success. Historical examples of multiple ship operations led by an on-scene commander from his flagship remain relevant even today.

Background

Throughout American naval history there are examples of commanders directing a squadron of ships through operations in both peace and war. The potential of a tailored military force operating from the high seas demonstrated visible American foreign policy of supporting allies, protecting commercial interests, and maintaining freedom of the

seas. Navy commodores operating from their flagships directed squadrons of various types of ships to maximize force capabilities and achieve mission success.

On the other hand, this is not to say that other aspects of naval warfare do not have an established historical record. Preponderant Mahanian fleet assets during total war, the power projection capacity of aircraft and amphibious assault, the deadly art of submarines, as well as the exploitation of space, certainly are vital elements in armed intervention and other applications of military power. However, not all of the above listed naval armaments can always reach the desired area of operation. Some examples of squadron commanders directing naval force intervention are provided below.

Both the Quasi-War with France (1798-1801) and the Barbary War (1801-05) were aimed at protecting American merchants from hostile raiders in distant waters. In both wars, senior naval officers called commodores commanded squadrons of a few U.S. combatants and ventured to the Caribbean and the Mediterranean Seas where American shipping interests lay. Groups of a half dozen ships escorted American merchant ships through perilous seas, deterring attack by plunder hungry opponents. In each case naval activities of sustained presence, convoy escort, seizing or sinking enemy shipping, and support of land operations such as shore bombardment, were the most dramatic and memorable method which the U.S. government chose to achieve its purpose.

At the end of the eighteenth century, French privateers and an occasional ship of the French Republican Navy preyed upon American merchant ships in the Caribbean Sea. The privateers operated from the French colonies of Santo Domingo, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. In 1797 the French vessels took 280 American ships.³ President Adams dispatched a few American navy ships to provide convoy protection and search for

privateers. Small U.S. Navy (USN) ships, especially schooners, proved valuable in the shallow waters around the tropical islands. Often squadron commanders dispersed their ships widely rather than sail them in company to cover the areas of operations prone to attacks by privateers. Larger frigates acted as flagships, mobile command posts for squadron commodores. The frigates could stay at sea longer, acted as logistical support for other units, and provided the fire power needed against the French Republican navy. Captain Truxtun on the flagship *Constellation* captured the Republican *Insurgente* ship of the line. Later, Commodore Talbot embarked in the frigate *Constitution* directed his flagship and a schooner to clamp down on privateers around Hispaniola.

In 1798 the French took only 105 American ships in the Caribbean, less than half of the year before.⁴ With France's list of enemies growing, Paris turned her attention elsewhere. The success of the USN squadrons in reducing the effectiveness of the privateers led the French to agree to rescind their authority for privateers to attack American merchants. Following this victory, President Jefferson directed the squadron commodores toward the next target of commercial interference which was the issue of tribute payments to the Barbary pirates in the Mediterranean Sea.

The USN followed a similar pattern of the deployment of a squadron consisting of a variety of ship types that conducted a long campaign in distant waters during the Barbary War. The first two squadron commanders established a pattern of USN presence and lost only one American merchant to the Barbary pirates. The third squadron commander was Edward Preble who initiated more offensive operations in the Mediterranean Sea. He established operating bases from Sicily and Malta with a balanced force of frigates, schooners, and brigs (two of each). One of his frigates, *USS*

Philadelphia went aground blockading the port of Tripoli and her crew was captured. Preble led a series of heroic military actions to deny the employment of the frigate by Tripoli as a threat to his flagship *Constitution*. Lieutenant Stephen Decatur sailed into the Port of Tripoli's harbor on a captured boat and set the *Philadelphia* on fire. Preble also contributed to the military conditions that led to a successful release of the *Philadelphia*'s crew held hostage and restored diplomatic relations for Tripoli and the United States.

There is a certain relevancy between today's fleet operations and 19th century frigate diplomacy in the age of sail. As "a modestly scaled U.S. Navy sent proportionately sized ships on global patrols in support of discrete national interests that generally coincided with those of the major western European nations"⁵ worked well then, the reduced size of today's navy and the interest in coalition defense is an argument for a return to those operational deployments.

Besides operating as expeditionary forces in undeclared wars, squadron commanders have played a role in the larger force structure of fleet engagements during wartime. One of the naval intermediate operational commanders of World War II was Captain Arleigh Burke. He led eight Fletcher-class destroyers of DESRON 23 as part of Adm. Halsey's "Hit hard, hit fast, hit often!" Third Fleet. Destroyer Squadron 23 participated in numerous patrol and escort duties in the Southwest Pacific. Before Captain Burke assumed command, the destroyers conducted operations in the Battle for Guadalcanal. They escorted men and material to the island, and sortied up the infamous "Slot" in the efforts to break up Japanese attacks and attempts to reinforce the island.

Captain Arleigh Burke emerged as a combat leader as the second commander of DESRON Twenty-three. He was a firm believer in the "attack-attack-attack" school of

destroyer tactics. During the period November 1943 to February 1944, the Squadron participated in 22 separate engagements, and reduced the Japanese Navy by one cruiser, nine destroyers, one submarine, and sunk several smaller ships as well as destroying approximately 30 aircraft.⁶ In addition, a number of other surface and aircraft were damaged, along with significant damage inflicted by shore bombardment actions.

DESRON 23 participated in the bombardment of Bougainville covering the landings at Empress Augusta Bay. Burke lost two of his ships to battle damage during the Solomon Islands campaign when the Americans encountered a more powerful Japanese force. Nevertheless the USN defeated the Japanese units decisively. The remaining destroyers continued to defy assaults by Japanese aircraft and closed strongly fortified shores to deliver sustained shelling of Japanese coastal defenses and cover amphibious assaults. On 24 November came the Battle of Cape St. George where the squadron took on six enemy destroyers. In what has been described as near perfect surface actions, the American destroyers sank four enemy destroyers, and damaged two more with zero casualties to their own units.⁷

Earning the nickname "31-knot Burke" for his high speed combat performance, Arleigh Burke became chief of staff to Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, Commander, Fast Carrier Task Force Fifty Eight (TF 58), in March 1944. Promoted to rear admiral, Burke planned and executed a long series of offensive operations in the reduction of the perimeter of Japanese defenses in New Guinea, the Carolines, the Marianas, and Philippine Islands. He efficiently controlled the tactical disposition, the operation, the security, and the explosive offensive power of TF 58 in its support of the amphibious landings at Iwo Jima and Okinawa as well as carrier air strikes on the Japanese homeland.

CDS Current Role in Maritime Operations

Successors to Captains Talbot, Preble, and Burke, CDS are located in fleet concentration sites in the continental U.S. (CONUS) and deploy on the same cycle with fleet units. Two DESRONs are forward deployed to PACOM and CENTCOM respectively. CDS Fifteen is assigned to the SEVENTH FLEET standing forces in Japan. CDS Fifty and his staff do not own any ships yet continually maintain operational control (OPCON) of designated surface combatant forces provided by Atlantic and Pacific Fleet commanders to FIFTH FLEET, the navy component of the Central Command. Other squadrons are tied to carrier battlegroups deployment cycles while reserve DESRONs fill specific roles such as responsibilities for the Western Hemisphere region.

There are some sixteen COMDESRONs in the navy today, roughly one-third of the USN O-6 commands for surface warfare designated officers. The other commands are Aegis cruisers or big deck amphibious ships commanding officers (CO). These positions are labeled naval "major commands." Other types of navy major commands are CO's of carriers, air wings, and submarine squadrons.

The DESRON's main operational mission is as a seagoing Warfare Commander asset. As an afloat major command, the squadron commander is assigned by a Numbered Fleet Commander as a Battle Group Commander or as an independent multi-ship commander at sea. For example, CDS 50 in the Persian Gulf and CDS 60 in the Mediterranean Sea are assigned as the fleet's Task Force commander (CTF) while the carrier and the embarked CVBG are tasked to depart the theater. In keeping with the nature of a naval expeditionary force as described in Naval Doctrine Publication (NDP 1), the CTF operate with other service or allied land based aircraft. Joint Maritime

Operations (JMO) arrangements supply aircraft on-call when the carrier airwing is not readily available to maintain air superiority.

DESRON staffs share the same primary and secondary mission areas responsibilities as a CVBG staff. According to the navy's Required Operating Capabilities and Projected Operating Employment (ROC & POEs), the only difference between the staffs is a DESRON is assigned a secondary role in three warfare areas where they do not have the capabilities of the extensive C2 and intelligence systems available in the CV. The ROC & POEs are assigned to every type of navy command such as each type of airframe, ship class, aircraft squadrons, and reserve units. ROC instructions form the baseline for operational readiness arranged by mission area. The instruction for a DESRON is in draft form, perhaps an indication of the fluid nature of that operational warfare commander. CDS can only benefit from the OPNAV staff issuing DESRON staff Required Operational Capabilities.

CDS and his staff routinely deploy with a CVBG. In the battle group task organization, CDS usually have tactical control (TACON) of three to five ships. With a small command element, the DESRON easily fits in a carrier where they can take advantage of the communication connectivity of the CV and use the Combat Direction Center as their op center. Embarked on the CV means a base of operations that is co-located with the Battle Group commander, has access to many intelligence systems, and provides aircraft for transport throughout the theater. On the CV the CDS also has the opportunity for direct interface with the air wing commander and submarine element coordinator for mission tasking liaison issues.

The warfare commander responsibilities assigned to the CDS differ from one CVBG to the next, depending on the nature of the naval expeditionary force. As part of the naval Composite Warfare Commander (CWC) organization, a CDS acts as the Surface Warfare Commander (SUWC), Undersea Warfare Commander (USWC), or Sea Control Commander (SCC) which is a combination of the two previous positions. If operating with an ARG, a logical choice is for the CDS to assume the SCC mission. Other CDS duties include Maritime Interception (MI) Coordinator, Tomahawk Launch Area Coordinator (LAC), and LAMPS (Helo) Element Coordinator (LEC). These seagoing warfare commander roles are responsible for all sensor surveillance, weapons employment, and unit maneuvers for the respective CWC area.

As with other forward deployed naval forces, the CDS plays a vital role in the Forward Presence aspect of the national military strategy. Besides conducting the pre-deployment training such as MIO rehearsals in support of United Nations sanctions, strike exercises, and Naval Surface Fire Support (NSFS) demonstrations for assigned forces, CDS act as executive agent for the numbered fleet commanders as the USN representative to bi-lateral and allied naval exercises. A CDS is often the proper level of command to build new maritime military partnerships and maintain the "familiarity developed over the years of combined military exercises and in the daily military contact among our forces."⁸ Cultural exchange benefits are valuable experiences in joint coalition warfare offered by many of these multi-national exercises involving port visits to foreign military headquarters. CDS also operate with Maritime Preposition Ship squadrons to exercise sealift capabilities for expeditionary forces. Finally, CDS are the operational commander for re-occurring anti-submarine warfare (ASW) SHAREM exercises. Held in

strategic areas of operations, SHAREM events collect numerous data points, employ new command and control (C2) concepts, as well as flex updated sensors and weapon systems.

There are two command, control and communications (C3) issues that each CDS faces while forward deployed. The C3 items are especially true when assigned as a CTF independent of the fleet, ARG or CVBG flagship. The first issue is a matter of staff expertise. Staff augments may be required depending on mission tasking. Support such as oceanographic, intelligence specialist, cryptological linguist, maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) liaison, acoustic intelligence, and public affairs⁹ increase the command element by nearly a third.

Secondly, communication connectivity is of course critical to effective C2. E-mail is the norm for many military applications. "Such capabilities enable a move into the realm of speed of command. Questions decrease because ambiguity decreases, collegiality increases, and timeliness shorten."¹⁰ One DESRON staff reported the following four systems as critical to its role as an intermediate operational commander: INMARSAT path to Joint Deployable Intelligence Support System (JDISS), EHF communication suite, SIPRNET access, and cell phones with extended range. Adequate communication connectivity and the requisite bandwidth overcome the liability of limited organic sources of information.

Information Technology

Network Centric Warfare (NCW) strives to harness the value of information itself "that is derived from the content, quality, and timeliness of information moving between

nodes of the network. This value increases as information moves toward 100% relevant content, 100% accuracy, and zero time delay--toward information superiority.”¹¹ The operational architecture consists of a high powered information backplane (or information grid), a sensor grid, and a transaction (engagement) grid. Just how this will apply to military operations such as establishing a security perimeter around terrorist enclave or bringing a suspected sanction violating vessel transiting territorial waters to a stop for boarding remains to be seen.

There are systems and prototypes operational that allow much greater flow and access of information. Intelligence internet type systems such as SIPRNET and INTELINK are available throughout all levels of command. Tactical displays in operation centers provide commanders with more realistic coverage of the battlefield. Defensive weapon systems such as Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC) combine a high-performance sensor and engagement grid. The sensor grid generates engagement quality awareness, and the engagement grid translates this awareness into increased combat power. Bottom line is a higher probability of hits against new classes of threats. Another move away from platform centric warfare is so-called effects centric systems. Planning experts from diverse locations on-line together conduct target selection, planning and approval via Joint Intelligence Virtual Architecture (JIVA) and Collaborative Targeting Tool (CTT).

The technologically advanced systems listed above support Precision Engagement and Full Dimensional Protection, operational concepts of Joint Vision 2010. Command decision making however still remains a human process. Ten years ago sociologist G.A. Klein demonstrated that 90% of our decisions are intuitive and only 10% analytical. He

labeled a normal process used by command authority which generated a workable first option then used a Recognition Primed Decision (RPD) process to quickly decide on a course of action. Klein also recommended investigating steps to implement the increasing sources of information available to decision makers such as improved strategies for effective decision making, determine how commanders can present strategic intent so that subordinates are able to improvise effectively, revised training procedures by focusing on situation assessment, and improved decision support systems with displays that will make it easier for operators to assess options in order to discover potential problems.¹² All this comes down to prove intuitive leaders are needed to provide direction to gain battlespace dominance.

Intermediate level commanders are searching for a defined role in the IT revolution. Joint Vision 2010 holds that “new technologies will allow increased capability at lower echelons to control more lethal forces over larger areas.” Further, “these capabilities could empower a degree of independent maneuver, planning, and coordination at lower echelons, which were normally exercised by more senior commanders in the past.”¹³ Capable systems such as CEC, Naval Surface Fires Support (NSFS) Ring of Fire, and Theater Ballistic Missile Defense (TBMD) provide combat power from a bottom up organization. Meanwhile, IT is providing decision makers at the theater commander levels with timely, accurate information to invite higher authority micro-management of battlespace actions. Does a CDS still have a role as a command and decision authority or merely a “strap hangar” holding on to a niche in the CWC structure in a CVBG? He could follow the tradition of Preble and Burke and take the offensive to help bridge the Navy’s operational capability gap to JV 2010.

CDS role in JV 2010

*U.S. naval forces will have to truly understand joint operations ...
the context of overseas presence means that the Navy, more than any other military
service, has to understand how other services operate*¹⁴ ADM Owens, VCJCS

CDS play a vital role in maritime and joint military operations into the 21st century in three areas: command authority for naval forces, peacetime engagement with joint coalition partners in a forward presence role, and a NCC for tailored joint operations.

COMDESRONs hold a position on the flagship in command of surface units supporting the missions of the entire battle group. A CDS also has the ability to operate from a destroyer providing the seagoing warfare mission commander for an ARG preparing battlespace superiority in the Amphibious Operating Area (AOA). Modern warships are increasingly capable and conduct multi-purpose assignments in C2, surveillance, engagement, and self sustainment. Navy unit commanders are responsible for capitalizing on their complex systems to complete multiple missions, even more difficult in the diverse littoral environment. A critical function for the seagoing warfare commander is to decide on the best role and maneuver position for his forces advocating the preferred application of his few assets. For example, Tomahawk-launching ships might find combat imperatives driving them in two different directions at once. In the absence of an intermediate commander, the ship's COs take on more responsibilities for joint mission planning and integration. Intermediate commanders are at a more suitable level to deal with command and staff issues.

When CINCs do not have the presence of a flag battle group commander, CDS 50 in the Persian Gulf and CDS 60 in the Mediterranean Sea fulfill the CTF responsibilities. The navy by demand is substituting one intermediate commander for another because of operational commitments. As long as the DESRON staff has the communications capability and connectivity they can fulfill nearly all the missions of a CVBG staff. If necessary, the CDS could co-locate with the numbered fleet commander when his surface task force units are spread throughout the theater. Naval task forces without a carrier air wing maintain strike warfare capability since numerous ships can fire tomahawk cruise missiles. An enemy can no longer assume the absence of a carrier means his industrial and military valuables are safe against attack from the sea. The DESRONs in the Western Hemisphere Group are available to provide the same established CTF role for SECOND FLEET units rotating assignments to Southern Command as well.

Command of naval forces is the heritage of Preble and Burke. In keeping with the goal of JV 2010 Quality Forces, the COMDESRON's next important operational role is working with allies. A CDS is the requisite level command to integrate and improve interoperability with allied & coalition partners many of whom do not have the power of a CVBG or an ARG. With less U.S. military presence overseas, naval forces will have to perform the presence role in a way that goes beyond traditional Navy to navy contacts. VCJCS Admiral Owens wrote "given the growing prominence of naval forces, it would be wrong not to use them in ways that go beyond their traditional peacetime activities. And to the extent that naval forces become increasingly important as a vehicle to build coalitions and maintain alliance ties, the need for them to cultivate regular contacts with

foreign armies and air forces increase also.”¹⁵ Planning and executing joint, coalition, and combined training is a function tailored made for the DESRON staff.

Naval command authority and forward deployed joint coalition building lead a CDS into the role as a maritime component commander for a JFC or JTF. Based on the wide range of seagoing warfare commander roles, a CDS is well versed in naval warfare to perform missions such as protecting sea lines of communication, keep logistics focused, prepositioned equipment flowing, rear areas protected and securing a safe operating area in the littorals. Destroyer squadron commanders assigned as the service component commanders in exercises is an opportunity to achieve valuable experience in JTF mission planning and execution the navy is unable to attain on its own. A current DESRON staff would require some augmentation in specific areas such as mentioned previously when assuming the CTF mission. If the JFC mission calls for striking power of a CV, a flag officer is included in the naval forces. Not all military operations today are at the level of conflict that needs such a carrier strike force. The nature of modern warfare demand that we fight as a joint team, we need to practice like one as well.

E-mail may be the norm for modern warfare, but battlefield decisions will still make the difference for successful operations. Intermediate operational commanders established on scene have information systems to pull required data analysis, and “smell the gunpowder” from the engaged networked tactical units. One author summarizes future challenging maritime issues to resolve involve targeting, collateral damage, over-the-horizon weapons, protection of merchant ships, medical transport, civilian aircraft, noncombatants, the environment and self-defense.¹⁶ DESRON staffs can manage all of

these issues, especially if an armed conflict is limited in scope and area. Information Technology may make the military's job easier by providing the path to the objective, but intermediate level commanders will supply the operational art to complete assigned objectives with less assets. Destroyer Squadron commanders are operational artists for naval component services for joint forces today.

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