

CSO NOTICE TO GUARDIANS (C-NOTE #6)

DATED: 2 FEB 23

SUBJECT: MISSION COMMAND

FROM: CSO

TO: ALL PERSONNEL

UNCLASS

Last month I had the privilege of meeting with Guardians assigned across Europe. Watching them innovate in support of NATO's vital mission reminded me of the importance of mission command to Space Force success, especially in high-intensity operations. Because of its importance, all Guardians should know what mission command is, what it is not, and how it is effectively applied.

What is mission command? The textbook answer in JP 3-0 *Joint Operations* defines mission command as "the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based on mission-type orders." In my opinion, this definition is too simplistic and not very instructive. Mission command is more than execution through mission-type orders. A 2012 CJCS White Paper provides a more informative definition. This paper defines mission command as "a continual cognitive effort to understand, to adapt, and to direct effectively the achievement of intent." This definition emphasizes that mission command is not a top-down sequence of "fire and forget" orders. Rather, it is a dynamic approach that shifts, morphs, and evolves as all echelons actively build a *shared understanding* of the mission.

A commander practicing mission command provides guidance and intent that directs what needs to be done (i.e., outcome), why it needs to be done (i.e., the purpose), and general guidelines for the activity (e.g., constraints, restraints, and command relationships). But mission command doesn't stop there. Mission command also requires all echelons to continuously *understand* the changing environment, *adapt* accordingly, identify unforeseen opportunities to *exploit*, and *update* commander's intent when appropriate. Over time, continuous active feedback up and down the chain-of-command builds a shared understanding that ignites rapid initiative.

Ultimately, mission command is about achieving the *commander's intent*, not completing tasks. This is an important distinction. Commander's direct the *what* and the *why*, subordinates figure out the *how*. A commander who tells lower echelons *how* to achieve intent is not really executing mission command. The art of mission command is providing clear intent without restricting the flexibility, initiative, and innovation of lower echelons. Like any skill, this takes practice.

Describing mission command is just the first step. We must deliberately work to incorporate this mindset into our culture. As a resource, I found the Joint Staff's publicly released *Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper* on mission command helpful. I encourage anyone who wants to learn more to read this short publication and begin socializing these ideas with your fellow Guardians.

I will share more thoughts on mission command in future C-Notes. In the meantime, let's continue the debate. Is mission command well understood? Is there a better definition than what I offered? Is it being effectively implemented in your organization? If not, what barriers impede implementation? Debating these questions will help us institutionalize mission command across the force.

Semper Supra!