



Sailor and Marine with 3rd Marine Regiment brace as CH-53E Super Stallion with Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 366 takes off from Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, California, July 2015 (U.S. Marine Corps/Owen Kimbrel)

Sustaining the “New Norm” of Jointness

By Case Cunningham, Patrick Donahoe, Mike Jernigan, and Michael Riggins

Today’s Joint Force is a highly experienced, battle-tested body of men and women, with a decade of practical, focused warfighting knowledge. . . . We must learn and properly place in context key lessons of the last decade of war and in doing so, we will prepare our leaders for what is ahead.¹

—GENERAL MARTIN E. DEMPSEY
18th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2012

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On May 25, 2011, a platoon from the U.S. Army’s 1st Battalion, 133rd Infantry Regiment, was ambushed near the village of Do Ab, Nuristan Province, Afghanistan. An estimated force of more than 300 Taliban engaged the small unit. As mortars and rocket-propelled grenades exploded around the Americans, two U.S. Air Force joint terminal attack controllers (JTACs) contacted a U.S. Air Force MC-12 tactical reconnaissance aircraft to relay requests for air support to other aircraft. While the Soldiers fought the Taliban, who outnumbered them roughly five to one, the JTACs directed fires from Air Force F-16s, F-15Es, and AC-130s; Navy F/A-18s; and Army AH-64s and OH-58s. The battle raged for 12 hours before the Taliban abandoned their attempts to overrun the platoon. More than 250 enemy forces were killed during the engagement. No American lives were lost.²

This short vignette is just one of many examples of the power of joint cooperation in combat operations. Whether through the synergistic employment of Service capabilities, as a result



Sailors direct F/A-18C Hornet from Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 83 on flight deck of USS *Harry S. Truman* (CVN 75) in U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations in Arabian Gulf, February 2016 (U.S. Navy/Lindsay A. Preston)

of individual augmentee assignments supporting another Service's efforts, or through experience serving on joint warfighting staffs, the officers of today's American military are arguably more joint than in any other time in the Nation's history. With U.S. forces in Afghanistan drawing down substantially, the best way to sustain this "new norm" of jointness is to bring these lessons to the junior officer and company-grade professional development programs of each Service. This article argues that giving junior officers more joint experience, education, and training opportunities earlier in their careers will accelerate this joint experience endowment and increase the combat effectiveness of the joint force.

The current American tradition of joint warfare came about as a direct result of the failed rescue attempt in 1980 of 53 Americans held hostage in Iran and the difficulties realized in joint operations during the 1983

invasion of Grenada. Following these two events, Congress took action with the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 and created requirements for joint education, qualification, and cooperation.

The New Norm

Over the last 13 years, U.S. Servicemembers have come to recognize the capabilities that each Service brings to the battlefield. In Iraq, the tactical implications of joint enablers often were not readily apparent to platoon leaders and company commanders on the ground. This shortcoming was brought home to one unit while conducting operations in a small town southwest of Baghdad in early 2006. As the patrol attempted to negotiate the warren of twists and turns in a village along the Euphrates, it continually made wrong turns. In the Battalion Tactical Operations Center, an Air Force JTAC offered

a solution: "I can have the F-16s 'sparkle' the intersections where the unit needs to turn and we can walk the patrol into the target—turn by turn." The ability of the aircraft to illuminate each intersection with an infrared beam visible to the patrol under night vision goggles is an example of the types of capabilities that should be understood at the lowest echelon *before* combat, not learned during it. We now have the opportunity to formalize an educational approach to ensure the next generation learns this lesson in a classroom or an exercise rather than having to relearn it the next time the capability can be brought to bear in combat.

In each Service, the first tour of duty for a company-grade or junior officer is spent learning the foundational skills of his or her trade, whether that of a pilot, platoon commander, ship driver, or signals officer. These formal courses traditionally focus on Service capability



U.S. Army Warrant Officer presents team findings during Warrant Officer Solarium at Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, January 2016 (DOD/David Vergun)

but should also incorporate elements of joint training and education. As the “sparkle” above illustrates, it is less likely that optimum force can be applied to an enemy at a decisive point if leaders in basic maneuver formations do not understand the capabilities of the joint force. The U.S. military’s asymmetric advantage in combat stems from the strength of unparalleled experience in joint warfighting. Even at the basic levels, Service schools must train to fundamental joint capabilities to effectively employ the force.

Career-level school for Army captains and Navy lieutenants (O3 level) in each of the Services is another opportunity to instill the efficacy of joint warfighting. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction on Officer Professional Military Education defines this level of schooling as “primary education.” While these schools focus on “preparing junior officers to serve in their assigned branch, warfare, or staff specialty,” the

Chairman’s instruction continues: “service schools that have programs centered on pay grade O-3 officers will foster an understanding of joint warfighting necessary for success at this level.” Even more specifically, appendix B to enclosure E of the instruction states that the joint emphasis of instruction in branch, warfare, staff specialty schools, and primary professional military education courses must prepare “officers for service in joint task forces (JTFs) where a thorough introduction in joint warfighting is required,” to include “the fundamentals of joint warfare, JTF organization and the combatant command structure, the characteristics of a joint campaign, how national and joint systems support tactical-level operations, and the capabilities of the relevant systems of the other services.”³

A quick survey of the mission statements of the primary education institutions of each of the Services, however, shows a less-than-enthusiastic embrace of

the Chairman’s guidance. Beginning with the Army, the Captains Career Course states that its mission is to:

*[provide] captains with the tactical, technical and leader knowledge and skills needed to lead company-size units and serve on battalion and brigade staffs. The course emphasizes the development of leader competencies while integrating recent operational experiences of the students with quality institutional training. It facilitates lifelong learning through an emphasis on self-development. The curriculum includes common core subjects, branch-specific tactical and technical instruction, and branch-immaterial staff officer training.*⁴

Note that a focus on education in the synergistic employment of joint capabilities is missing in action in the above definition.

Moving to the Air Force, the Squadron Officer School’s stated purpose



Marine assigned to 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit coordinates landing of MV-22 Osprey on San Clemente Island, California, September 2015 (U.S. Marine Corps/Alvin Pujols)

is to “educate, motivate, and mentor captains as current and future Air Force leaders.”⁵ But as with the Army, there is no mention of *joint* leaders. Furthermore, the school aims to have “officers step out of their specialties and broaden their focus on essential leadership competencies . . . in Officership, Leadership, Problem Solving, Core Values, and the Air Force as an institution in the profession of arms.”⁶ According to the written goals of the school, “educated students will value their unique role as Air Force officers by applying airpower leadership to effectively execute military missions, and valuing the warrior-leader ethos and its impact on airpower development.”⁷ Again, as in the case of the Army, there is no reference in the Air Force definition to developing an understanding of joint capabilities.

The Marine Corps and Navy schools have similarly stated Service-exclusive goals: “The Expeditionary Warfare School challenges students to think critically as Marine Air Ground Task Force officers by providing them with a firm doctrinal foundation, augmented with

the exchange of practical experiences, and reinforced with extensive practical application and numerous planning exercises.”⁸ In just one example of Navy primary education, the Surface Warfare Officers School’s stated mission is “to provide a continuum of professional education and training in support of Surface Navy requirements that prepares officers and enlisted engineers to serve at sea.”⁹

As these examples show, all of the Services’ junior officer-level courses have gaps in following the Chairman’s guidance and are missing opportunities to create the next generation of warfighters who think jointly. General Anthony Zinni, USMC (Ret.), the former commander of U.S. Central Command and a well-respected authority on joint education, agrees. As he stated in an interview in 2014:

We need to push joint education to lower and lower ranks. In my day, we only got it at the war colleges; now it is at the major’s schools. We need to get it to the captain’s schools—in Expeditionary Warfare School. Also, we do more of it at “touch point”

*schools that are only three weeks in length. More joint familiarization is good, and the younger in a career it occurs [the] better. Joint is how we fight now!*¹⁰

Vision for Joint Officer Development

The Chairman’s *Vision for Joint Officer Development* lays out a structure for a joint learning continuum with four pillars: joint individual training (JIT), joint professional military education (JPME), joint experience, and self-development.¹¹ The Army has built on this guidance with its Army Leader Development Strategy (ALDS), which frames this process into three domains: institutional (the Service schoolhouses and their professional military education); operational (the experiences gathered while operating as a member of military organizations and units); and self-development.¹² These domains are similar to the Joint Officer Development categories when JIT and JPME are viewed as subsets of the institutional domain. ALDS provides a useful frame-

work to address proposed changes to junior- and company-grade officer professional development.

From an institutional standpoint, the career-level Service schools should continue to teach doctrine and capabilities, but also demonstrate how these elements should nest within and complement joint doctrine and the capabilities of the other Services. There are two other simple and low-cost methods to better incorporate joint capabilities into these schools. The first is to have instructors from each of the schools use vignettes with joint applications as part of their instructional techniques. These examples of joint success and failure are available from many sources, but one of the best is from the consortium of Service doctrine organizations known as the Air Land Sea Application Center.¹³ The second recommendation is to expand “cross-pollination” of exchange instructors. While senior- and intermediate-level Service schools have a number of instructors from the other Services, the junior schools have much less—often zero—representation. The Army and Marine Corps do typically exchange a single instructor, but neither Service has Air Force or Navy instructors at the Service career-level schools.

Operationally, we must take advantage of collocated organizations from the different Services. For example, Navy Information Warfare junior officers typically are first assigned to Navy Information Operations Command sites for initial training. Each site is located at an installation with other Services. These sites are populated by junior and senior officers from multiple Services who represent the respective perspectives. With just a little coordination, these venues could have great potential to serve as prime opportunities to cultivate and implement joint policies and joint acclimatization. Similar opportunities exist throughout the military enterprise. Identifying and leveraging these “joint village” assignments could serve as the first step in the establishment of a roadmap for junior officers to be exposed to and complete joint education at an earlier stage in their careers. Additionally, more effort and

focus must be placed on ensuring that joint operational exercises are the norm rather than the exception. The increased capability of live, virtual, and constructive exercise frameworks can provide excellent joint training in all warfighting domains for junior- and company-grade officers.

From a self-development perspective, the Chairman’s own reading list should focus specifically on joint education and warfighting and should be updated each year to reflect the growing quantity of literature on recent conflicts. The most current version of the list, released in 2012, outlines 18 books that, according to the Chairman’s preface, capture “the values and ethos of our military profession; promote innovative thinking to prepare for the operational realities of an uncertain future; and provide insights into the foundations of our Service cultures.”¹⁴ Since the individual Services each have extensive reading lists that also address these topics, the Chairman’s list might better focus on Service cultures and capabilities for the joint fight, especially regarding a targeted list for junior- and company-grade officers. Moreover, virtual and collaborative educational tools could be used to amplify joint discussions of the lessons learned from the books. These virtual meetings, while never a substitute for face-to-face interaction, would add a greater depth of understanding and a higher degree of value to these self-study programs.

While drawing down combat operations comes with institutional and organizational challenges, it also provides opportunities. Today’s opportunity is finding ways to capitalize on the joint experience of the current force and strengthening joint development in our junior- and company-grade officer ranks. Such an investment would provide the strength that will contribute to success on future battlefields. Through full and enthusiastic adherence to the Chairman’s guidance on primary education and a deliberate approach to sustaining this new norm of jointness, we can accelerate the joint experience endowment and increase the combat effectiveness of the joint force. We cannot afford to do less. JFQ

Notes

¹ Martin E. Dempsey, “Joint Education White Paper,” July 16, 2012, 3, available at <www.dtic.mil/doctrine/concepts/white_papers/cjcs_wp_education.pdf>.

² *Portraits in Courage 2012*, vol. VII (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Air Force, 2012), 39, available at <http://static.dma.mil/usaf/courage/archives/AF_PortraitsInCourage_VolVII.pdf>; Ryan Matson, “Washington ANG Guide Air Strikes, Turns Tide During Major Battle,” available at <www.dvidshub.net/news/73124/washington-ang-guide-air-strikes-turns-tide-during-major-battle#U-0ZisKKDIU>.

³ “Officer Professional Military Education Policy (OPMEP) CJCSI 1800.01D IAW CJCSI 1800.01D, 15 July 2009, CH 1, 15 December 2011,” available at <http://dtic.mil/cjcs_directives/cdata/unlimit/1800_01.pdf>.

⁴ Pamphlet 600-3, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, February 1, 2010), available at <www.apd.army.mil/jw2/xmldemo/p600_3/main.asp#s14-7d>.

⁵ Air University, “Squadron Officer School,” available at <www.au.af.mil/au/soc/sos.asp>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Marine Corps University, “Expeditionary Warfare School,” available at <www.mcu.usmc.mil/ews/SitePages/Home.aspx>.

⁹ Surface Warfare Officers School Command, “Surface Warfare Officers School,” available at <www.netc.navy.mil/centers/swos/About.aspx?ID=1>.

¹⁰ Anthony Zinni, interview by authors, Norfolk, Virginia, July 23, 2014.

¹¹ *CJCS Vision for Joint Officer Development* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, November 2005), 7, available at <www.dtic.mil/doctrine/education/officer_JPME/cjcsvision_jod.pdf>.

¹² *Army Leader Development Strategy 2013* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, June 2013), available at <<http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/cal/ALDS5June%202013Record.pdf>>.

¹³ See the center’s Web site at <www.alsa.mil>.

¹⁴ Martin E. Dempsey, “Chairman’s Reading List, 2012,” available at <www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/CJCS-ReadingList2012.pdf>.