NEWS FROM THE FRONT

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The Role of the NCO Inside the BCT Command Post

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Noncommissioned officers (NCOs) have been leading Soldiers since the days of General Friedrich von Steuben and the blue book that codified the responsibilities of NCOs during that period in history (U.S. Army, TC 7-22.7, 2014). The NCO corps has grown a lot since then and so has its roles and responsibilities; however, one thing has remained constant - accomplishment of the mission and the welfare of Soldiers. NCOs mostly operate at the tactical level conducting the day-to-day operations inside of the company team and are relied upon to execute complex tactical tasks, train junior enlisted Soldiers on military occupational skills and drills at the individual and team level. NCOs account for and maintain individual and unit equipment while caring for Soldiers and their families on and off duty. NCOs coach, mentor, and teach Soldiers on the unit's mission and create training programs and processes for supporting the mission. NCOs do this while demonstrating Army values and instilling the value of the professional Army ethic, ensuring that character and competence are measured equally and have balance throughout the formation.

Doctrine 2015 introduced the importance of mission command doctrine into operations at all levels of leadership, and in the last five years NCOs have defined their role in mission command as it applies to their military occupational specialty duties and responsibilities. We as NCOs, however, sometimes find it difficult to identify our role during command post operations. This is understandable, because as NCOs we are familiar with executing at the tactical level and then after years of learning and refining our craft at the tactical level, we are introduced into the unfamiliar environment of the brigade combat team (BCT) command post. This paper will share some command post experiences obtained during my tenure as a G-3 sergeant major and also address some observations noted during Joint Pacific Multinational

Readiness Capability exercises in order to better define the NCO's role in the BCT command post.

Mission Command and the Command Post

FM 6-0 defines a command post as a “unit headquarters where the commander and staff perform their activities” and NCOs are a key part of that staff. Command posts are designed and organized based on specific functions; however, activities that are common in all command posts include: maintaining a common operating picture; running estimates; controlling and assessing operations; developing and producing orders; coordination with higher headquarters, subordinate, and adjacent units; conducting knowledge and information management; network operations; and providing a facility for the commander to control operations, issue orders, and conduct rehearsals, all while supporting the commander’s decision-making process (U.S. Army, FM 6-0, 2014). Mission command is an “exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations” (U.S. Army, ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*). Mission command is comprised of two components, the “art of command” and the “science of control” (U.S. Army, ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*). We go back to the all too familiar question: Where does the NCO fall into this process? What is an NCO's role inside a BCT command post? How do NCOs support the mission and facilitate mission command for the commander? The answer - we do exactly what we have always done at the tactical level. Let’s look at this from a perspective of conducting the day-to-day operations or the routine tasks of a command post. Accomplishing these routine tasks start with individual training of Soldiers and NCOs which is a familiar task. If you look at the Figure 1-1, both the “art of command” and the “science of control” are enabled through mission command systems and

Figure 1-1, Mission Command

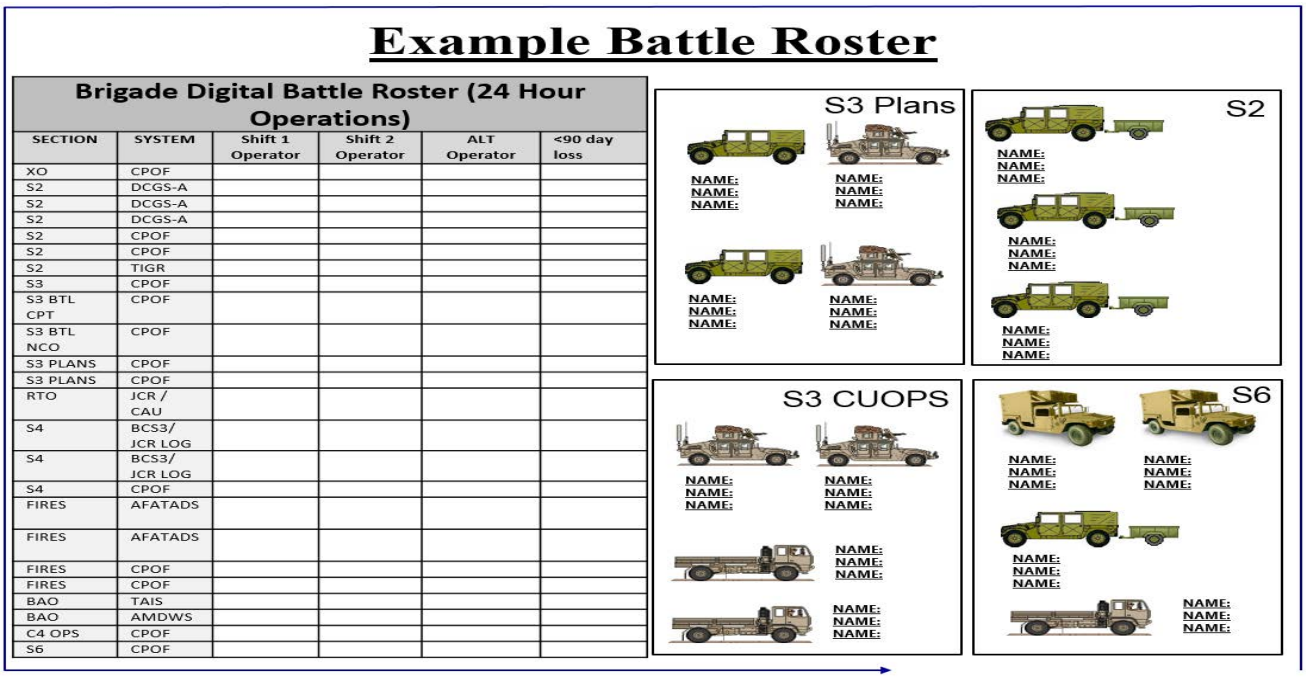
networks. How do we leverage this technology if our Soldiers are not individually trained on warfighting function information systems? We must align training with command post positions and select the right NCOs and Soldiers for those jobs and positions. Numerous mission command systems are utilized throughout the BCT command post in order to enable mission command through the warfighting functions. The Joint Capabilities Release (JCR), JCR Log, Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System (AFATDS), Air Missile Defense Workstation (AMDWS), Air Defense System Integrator (ADSI), Tactical Airspace Integration System (TAIS), and Command Post of the Future (CPOF) are just a few of the mission command information systems utilized by warfighting functions that allow a command post to facilitate

the science of control in regard to mission command. NCOs aspire to master their craft and our approach to mastering information systems should be no different. If a Soldier is assigned to operate as a part of a command post, we must recognize that our mission command information systems are just another weapon that we must master. The Mission Command Digital Master Gunner (MCDMG) Course at the Mission Command Center of Excellence (MCCOE) was created to do just that; it creates a subject matter expert that can operate and maintain information systems. Not every NCO that operates a mission command information system has to be a digital master gunner, as mission training complexes across the Army can facilitate operator training for all information systems; however, MCDMGs will make command posts more efficient and allow NCOs to better leverage information system capabilities for the commander while also serving as the senior trainer for information system sustainment training. This individual training is only a small part of an NCO's role while operating as a part of the BCT command post.

Command Post Organization

It can be difficult to wrap our hands around this thing we call the BCT command post. The numerous personnel across warfighting functions and staff sections, equipment, and the individual and team training in itself that is required to execute the science of mission command can seem overwhelming; however, senior NCOs and sergeants major are expected to execute command post responsibilities regardless of the amount of experience or institutional training they have received on command post operations. The first step is to organize the personnel and equipment in order to truly see the organization. One approach is to look at the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) and determine exactly what personnel and equipment are indeed authorized allowing the noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) or sergeant

major to create a command post battle roster. Figure 1-2 provides a format for a battle roster. Nothing special here, as senior NCOs have been creating, updating, and maintaining battle rosters



Example Battle Roster

Brigade Digital Battle Roster (24 Hour Operations)

SECTION	SYSTEM	Shift 1 Operator	Shift 2 Operator	ALT Operator	<90 day loss
XO	CPOF				
S2	DCGS-A				
S2	DCGS-A				
S2	DCGS-A				
S2	CPOF				
S2	CPOF				
S2	TIGR				
S3	CPOF				
S3 BTL CPT	CPOF				
S3 BTL NCO	CPOF				
S3 PLANS	CPOF				
S3 PLANS	CPOF				
RTO	JCR / CAU				
S4	BCS3/ JCR LOG				
S4	BCS3/ JCR LOG				
S4	CPOF				
FIRES	AFATADS				
FIRES	AFATADS				
FIRES	CPOF				
FIRES	CPOF				
BAO	TAIS				
BAO	AMDWS				
C4 OPS	CPOF				
S6	CPOF				

Figure 1-2, Example Battle Roster

since we served as platoon sergeants. Leveraging battle rosters to visualize the authorized personnel and equipment helps us see ourselves. A command post battle roster also assists the entire staff to see all of the components of the BCT command post and if there are any equipment or personnel shortages associated with warfighting functions based on the MTOE. The command post battle roster will also serve senior NCOs and the brigade operations sergeants major when organizing the tactical movement of the command post and assigning specific training based on duty position.

Command Post Categories

Organizing the command post in terms of categories allows NCOs to create processes and procedures that support establishing the command post. Command posts categories include the physical structure, infrastructure, information systems and screen displays, and Combat Net

Radios (CNR). The first category of the command post is the **physical structure**. Physical structures can be tents or hardstand buildings. The Global War on Terror has reduced our proficiency in effectively establishing a mobile command post because we have been operating out of hardstand buildings more often than not. Executing command post operations in austere environments utilizing tents is crucial to support the combined arms maneuver of the

brigade. Physical layout of the command post can promote or hinder the ability to enable the science of mission command. Determining how the command post will be laid out is the first part of the physical structure category and normally the BCT operations sergeant major, executive officer (XO), and S-3 determine the layout and gain the commander's approval. Most command posts are comprised of the Trailer-Mounted Support System (TMSS). We NCOs must also train our Soldiers and officers how to operate the TMSS system and how to establish the command post utilizing the equipment assigned. These actions must be rehearsed until they can be executed without direction, just like a battle drill. Battle drills are trained by NCOs at the tactical level and there is no difference with this type of battle drill at the organizational level. Each piece of equipment has a specific location in the movement serial per the battle roster based on the first piece of equipment that needs to be emplaced. Rehearsing battle drills is the only way to build efficiency, and the battle drills associated with the establishment of the BCT command post are no different, in order to obtain timely establishment.

Command Post Infrastructure

Power generation is the heart of any command post and the Army's inventory that supports

Figure 1-3, Power Distribution Illumination System Electric (PDISE) Essential Components

command post power generation primarily consists of the 15kw, 30kw and 60kw generators and power plants. Understanding how to operate these generators is only a small part of maintaining power for the command post. One consideration is Power Distribution Illumination System Electric (PDISE) components that make up the equipment used to transmit power from the generator to the equipment using the power. M100s, M40s, power cables and M46 Electrical Distribution Kits make up essential PDISE components. Leveraging generator mechanics and field support representatives (FSR) to teach Soldiers and NCOs how to operate and maintain generators and installation of PDISE equipment is crucial. Have you ever been in that command post that lost power or lost power to certain equipment when a printer starting printing or a coffee maker was turned on? Understanding how PDISE configurations distribute loads in order to maintain balanced loads on the generators is a science in itself and an important part of

training if we are to master command post power generation requirements. Frequency of fueling and maintenance of generators is another consideration. Remember that personnel will not only service power plants that are providing power to the command post, but will also be fueling and maintaining TMSS generators that provide power to the Environmental Control Units (ECUs) that keep us and our digital equipment cool in the summer and warm in the winter. This is easily 10-12 generators that require refueling; however, power plants can also support powering ECUs utilizing the PDISE power generation cables reducing the requirement for fueling TMSS generators that power ECUs. Optimizing the load on a generator is important to the life of a generator and leveraging generator mechanics and FSRs is important when training power generation teams on their duties and responsibilities. Power generation along with voice/data wiring also requires a diagram to depict where power generation cables and PDISE components are emplaced along with the **voice/data network wiring** that support our mission command systems. This wiring diagram depicts a certain layout that is followed each time the command post is established. These actions must also be rehearsed until it can be executed without direction, just like a battle drill. While most everyone that operates in the command post is involved with setting up the physical structure, special teams associated with power generation immediately start establishing power. This allows other special teams associated with command post infrastructure for voice/data wiring, and the network, to execute their specific lines of effort. In short, identifying special teams for each category of the command post enables those teams to master the tasks associated with their duties through repetition.

Mission Command Information Systems (MCIS) & Screen Displays

Mission Command Information Systems training was covered previously during the introduction; however, this is also another category of command post establishment. Once the

physical structure is established and command post infrastructure teams have completed power generation requirements along with running network wiring, MCDMG and other team members are simultaneously setting up tables, chairs and then emplacing their mission command systems. MCDMGs immediately start to establish mission command information systems and other war fighting function information systems in order for the command post to obtain and share the same information; however, in order to obtain shared understanding across the staff and at echelon, it is also necessary to establish the common operating picture (COP) utilizing **screen displays** in the current operations (CUOPS) section of the command post. Understanding how the COP facilitates the operations process allows NCOs that operate mission command systems, to leverage the technical capability enabling the commander to understand, visualize, describe, direct, lead and assess. During the planning phase of the operations process, the COP can assist subordinate commanders with their own planning within the commander's intent by depicting the operational picture through graphics and friendly air/ground forces icons. This also supports subordinate leaders and staff to identify relevant information for the operation. Additionally, the COP promotes collaboration because subordinate commanders and staff can view the battlefield identically from different locations and this supports parallel planning for subordinate units as well. During the prepare phase, the COPs common framework can facilitate back briefs for subordinate leaders to confirm the commander's intent and concept of the operation. Tactical plans and staff estimates are updated in real time and can be immediately revised. During the execution phase, the COP depicts the shared situational understanding which enables the

Figure 1-4, Current Operations Tent

synchronization of all war fighting functions, and information obtained during the previous phases of the operations process. The COP also allows leaders to measure unit performance during the assess phase. These are just a few of the tasks that can be performed when NCOs understand the capability of our information systems which is why we must master them in order to apply those capabilities during all phases of the operations process.

Combat Net Radios (CNR)

The final category of a command post is **Combat Net Radios** or voice communications. While our information systems allow us to use Ventrilo and chat rooms to communicate, tactical operations at the company and below level are still executed with tactical radios. NCOs are very

Figure 1-5, Command Post Platform (CPP) and Common Access Unit (CAU)

familiar with operating tactical radios; however, how do we leverage our technology in order to become more efficient as we establish our tactical voice communications. Moving radios, radio mounts, and power supplies can be time consuming. Utilizing Command Post Platforms (CPPs) and remoting our radios into our command posts using Common Access Units (CAUs) prevent

us from having to physically move radio's into the command post. The desktop CAU weighs about 9 pounds, has a push-to-talk switch and two handset ports. Another type of CAU, the soft CAU, provides the capability of a desktop CAU on your laptop, desktop or information system workstation. It is a web browser based application and no other hardware is required for the soft CAU which means more space at work stations and no additional hardware is required to be set-up. The soft CAU allows the user to use a computer mouse to monitor and talk on different nets and audio is routed through headphones and a microphone that is attached to the computer. A lot of time spent on establishing tactical voice communications can be saved by leveraging technology available through the different CAU devices and leveraging CPP capability.

Command Post Establishment

Establishing the command post is a difficult task and process. The command post has a layout where each tent, vehicle, generator and antenna is supposed to be positioned and each command post has a process of what order it will be assembled. This, in turn, creates a battle

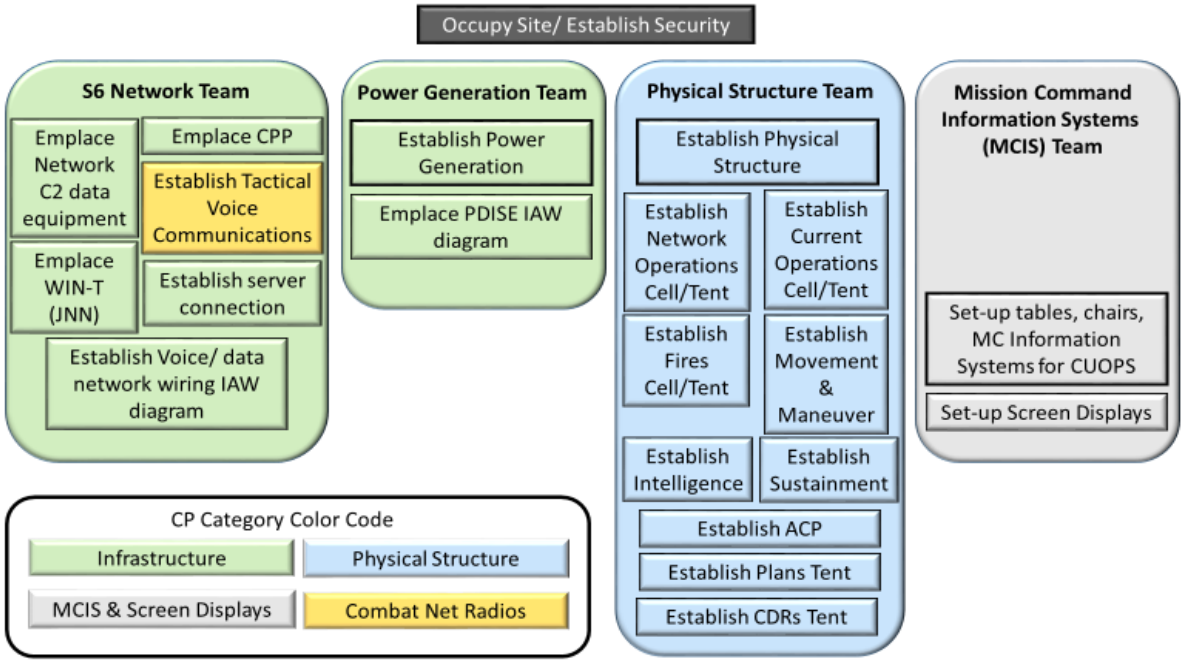


Figure 1-6, Establish Command Post Drill Example

drill for command post establishment and NCOs execute battle drills. NCOs must first organize personnel into special teams, similar to the special teams in a squad or platoon. These special teams, controlled by an NCO serving as the team leader, execute lines of effort associated with the different categories of a command post. Each color on the slide represents one of the command post categories outlined earlier. There are also four teams that conduct the tasks reflected in their line of effort. The teams conduct their specific tasks in the sequence reflected, but also are conducting their lines of effort simultaneously with the other teams. It is also important to understand that not all teams will finish or even start at the same time and an example of this would be the power generation team. They will finish long before the S6 network team or physical structure team are finished; however, the MCIS team will not begin their tasks until the CUOPS cell/tent is established. Understanding this allows the operations sergeant major to effectively and efficiently manage the team NCOICs during the establishment and tear down of the command post. The example provided is “a way” not “the way” as the task order can be changed based on priorities and lines of effort can be adjusted as well; however, the battle drill concept is important to adopt in order to create a mobile command post that can be established in a timely manner.

Other Considerations

There are other considerations as well. Efficiency, capability and capacity of command posts must be balanced to support combined arms maneuver. Do we need our command posts to resemble the Colosseum? Maybe, depending on how long the command post will be in the same location and how much capacity the organization needs to create, but where we go wrong is thinking that we must have that much capability and capacity for every mission. Creating different variations of our command posts that build upon one another is a solution. This is

determined during command post planning, and time, mission, and the concept of the operation serve as planning considerations. Think in terms of how much capability and capacity you build in each phase of command post establishment and then name that specific configuration. You don't want to create configurations that require different battle drills, but one long phased battle drill that takes you from configuration A which is a reduced capability for a short amount of time

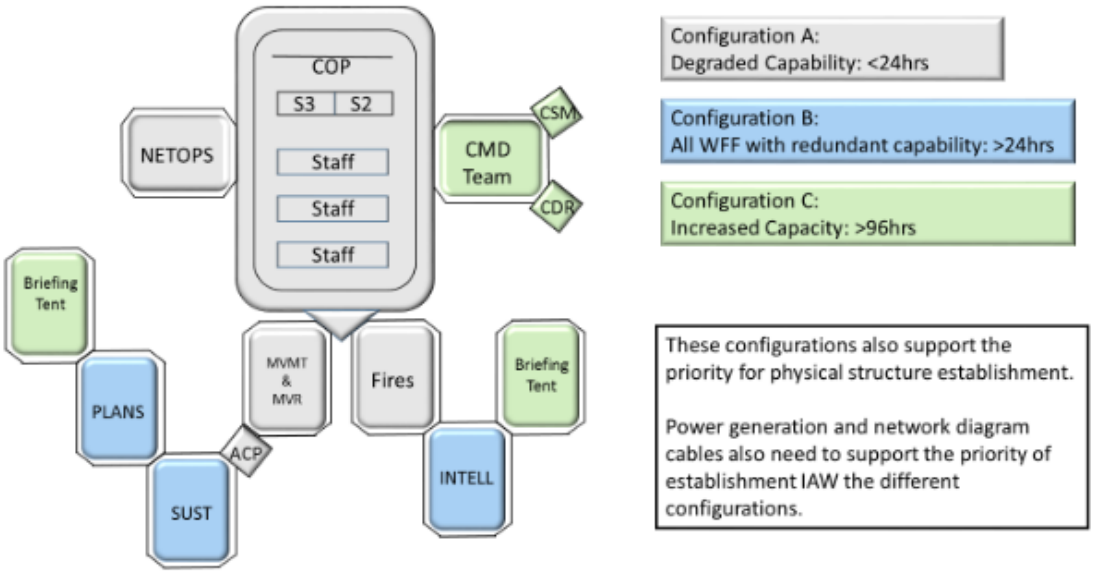


Figure 1-7, Configuration Example / Phased Establishment

to a configuration C or even D that has every capability, redundancy and the most capacity over a long period of time. The slide above depicts command post configurations for the physical structure only. The gray physical structures in the depiction reflect a degraded capability for only a short duration. The blue structures are added to the existing grey structures which provide redundant capabilities and more capacity for a longer duration. The final configuration depicted by green structures do not provide any more capability, but provides more capacity over a longer duration. Leveraging our tactical command post and using it as an extension of our main command post can also augment the aforementioned process. Depending on the environment,

like a decisive action training rotation, a BCT may never obtain a configuration C level in the example above because combined arms maneuver in a decisive action environment requires command posts to be extremely mobile.

Leader Development

NCOs do routine things routinely. We run the day to day operations of organizations at the tactical level and a command post is no different; we simply execute tasks associated with standard or routine operations in a command post. Creating schedules for shift changes, organizing Soldiers into teams, executing generator refueling and maintenance, radio checks, communications security (COMSEC) changeover, updating running estimates and the COP, and leveraging our information systems to support the science of mission command are just a few of the routine tasks. Teaching our junior and senior NCOs when those routine tasks are no longer routine is a crucial part of developing our junior leaders in a command post. As we execute the science of mission command, there is some art involved with it. An example would be COMSEC changeover. COMSEC changeover is supposed to happen at a certain time on a certain day and NCOs execute this; however, do we want to execute COMSEC change over during a joint forcible entry or a combined arms breach? Can noncommissioned officers underwrite that level of risk? The answer is no, and that is where the art lies when executing the science of mission command. We must develop our junior and senior NCOs to recognize when routine tasks are no longer routine and ensure those decisions are made at the appropriate level. The brigade XO manages the staff while the commander drives the operations process; however, neither are probably thinking about the brigade's COMSEC changeover which is scheduled to be executed during the combined arms breach; however, the NCO responsible for the COMSEC changeover is thinking about it. Ensure we include the entire staff in the planning process and

develop our junior leaders to understand that a change in conditions can turn routine tasks into a commander's decision point.

Conclusion

An NCOs role in a command post is truly no different than his or her role at the tactical level. NCOs organize Soldiers for the mission by creating a battle roster that reflects the Soldiers and equipment assigned. NCOs identify the training that needs to be conducted in each of the categories of a command post and create teams responsible for specific tasks that support the overall collective tasks of establishing the command post. NCOs create processes that support efficiency, both in the establishment and during operations of the command post, and then we rehearse those processes until they become as familiar as a battle drill. This is an NCOs role in a command post, the same role we have executed since the days of the blue book and the same duties and responsibilities we executed in those all too familiar company teams. It is our job to master those fundamentals of command post operations in order to bring the brigade combat team closer to mastering the fundamentals of combined arms maneuver.

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