TACTICAL TERMINOLOGY

Implementation (Command vs. Control)

By Sid Heal

One of the most confusing aspects of tactical operations is one that deals with the concepts of command and control. Although each describes distinct aspects of directing human endeavor, they are closely related and often mistaken for one another. The military considers them inseparable and identifies their relationship with the abbreviation "C^2." However, each describes a different characteristic. Where command is the power one holds because of his position in an organization, control is the influence exerted by personal expertise, persuasion or charisma. Command involves delegated authority; that is authority which a person possesses by virtue of his position within an organization. Control however, involves perceived authority, which is authority bestowed upon a person by those he seeks to direct.

COMMAND INVOLVES DELEGATED AUTHORITY

The responsibilities and duties of a commander differ significantly from those of a manager, supervisor or director. Yet words like "commanding," "managing" and "leading" are often used interchangeably as if no difference exists. A "leader" attempts to guide or direct a person, often by persuasion or influence, to a course of action or thought. Similarly, a "manager" attempts to get a person to do his or her wishes by skill, tact, flattery, and so forth. "Command," however, implies the formal exercise of absolute authority, as by a sovereign or military leader. The functions of leading and managing are of considerably longer duration than commanding and tend to be more of a process than an event. Granted, there are common elements in all types of direction concerning human endeavor. However, none even approach the absolute power exerted by a commander. Further, they are seldom performed under the crisis conditions which require a commander. In fact, command has been defined as "the ruthless application of power." The critical need for obedience overrides any concern for personal feelings.

Regardless of the knowledge and skills of even the most adept commander, no individual is capable of controlling every facet of even the smallest tactical operation. Secondary missions must necessarily be supervised by persons who work for the commander. Experts are frequently called upon to perform missions such as explosive ordnance disposal, mountain or urban rescues, canine searches and fire fighting. A commander should dictate the missions for these units but should not attempt to control the personal efforts of the individuals involved. For example, a person may command the pilot of a helicopter, but he certainly wouldn't be in control of the aircraft. It is just as absurd to expect one person to control the actions of other specialized personnel as they attempt to disarm an explosive device, conduct a canine search or make an entry. In fact, it is not unusual for a person to be in command and not be in control and, conversely, be in control and not in command. A litmus test for determining whether one has command or control is the ability to inflict punishment. If the person has the ability to compel action under penalty of punishment, he would be in command. If he does not, he may still be in control but he is definitely not in command. ■