

# TACTICAL CONCEPTS

## Topic Area: Implementation (Mission Tasking)

By Sid Heal

One of the most difficult and labor-intensive functions of any tactical operation is assigning and supervising the myriad of tasks that must be accomplished to achieve a successful resolution. This problem is frequently aggravated for two reasons. First, in many operations, the people involved work for other units or agencies and their skills and abilities are unknown, and second, some tasks require expertise in other disciplines, such as fire-fighting, health services or public works. Thus, a commander is forced to rely heavily on the expertise of people performing tasks he may not even fully understand.

One of the most useful methods for managing this problem is with "mission tasking." It begins by recognizing that each mission actually consists of two parts: the task to be accomplished and the reason or intent it is necessary. Of the two, the intent is predominant. In the dynamic environment of tactical operations, circumstances and situations will change, often rendering a task unnecessary or even inappropriate, but the intent is more lasting and will continue to provide guidance for actions. When it can be seen that an assigned task is ineffectual or counterproductive, subordinates are free to exercise their own judgment and initiative to find other means of achieving the commander's intent. This may require completing an assignment in a unique manner, or even some other task altogether.

Mission tasking requires that a commander tell a subordinate what to do and why it needs to be done but not how to do it. In the midst of the chaos and confusion inherent in tactical operations, mission tasking provides subordinates the means to resolve problems by focusing on the commander's intent rather than dogmatic adherence to detailed instructions. The commander's intent is the "glue" that holds the concept of operations and the missions together by promoting a unity of effort in fast-moving situations which do not readily conform to detailed plans and expectations.

The concept of operations identifies any series of actions designed to progressively promote the accomplishments of the ultimate objective. It may be more simply understood as a scheme for orienting the actions of subordinates without precisely prescribing what has to be done.

### Two Forms of Assignments

The assignments that accompany missions take on one of two forms. "Specified tasks" are those assignments

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that are fully and clearly expressed, leaving no room for doubt or uncertainty. These come from higher authority and describe what needs to be done to accomplish intermediate objectives. If the concept of operations has been fully developed, the process is greatly simplified because the most critical and most immediate missions are usually apparent. Examples of specified tasks include instructions to subordinates to conduct evacuations, make reliefs or begin negotiations.

Specified tasks are always accompanied by implied tasks. "Implied tasks" are those tasks that are implicitly derived from the commander's intent. To illustrate an implied task, let's assume the commander has given you a mission to establish a containment in order to prevent the escape of a suspect. Establishing the containment is the task and preventing the escape of the suspect is the intent. The specified task is to establish a containment. Implied tasks might include assigning observation posts, barricading streets, posting sentries, or any other task necessary to set up the containment. Implied tasks are the responsibility of subordinates and allow a commander to focus on bigger issues while avoiding becoming entangled with painstaking details and elaborate planning.

To illustrate how mission tasking might work in an everyday activity, let's imagine that you are taking a long road trip and need to have your car in tip-top shape. When you take it to your mechanic, you tell him what you need (task) and why (intent). You will usually specify some things you want done. For example, you may tell him that you want the tires rotated, the oil changed and the tank filled. These are the "specified tasks."

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Because the mechanic knows the reason (intent) the work is necessary, he may also adjust the belts, check your fluid levels and change the windshield wiper blades. He might also suggest that some worn parts be replaced rather than repaired. These are "implied tasks" and rely on the understanding and expertise of the mechanic to ensure that you are capable of achieving your objective. Thus, while you (the commander) concentrate on other essential tasks such as route selection or lodging arrangements, you rely upon your subordinate (mechanic) to ensure your car is capable of making the long trip.

Mission tasking is critical for focusing the efforts of subordinates while exploiting their expertise and initiative without encumbering them (and you) with elaborate and restrictive instructions which will, in any event, require constant adjustment to adapt to the constantly changing circumstances. ■

*Editor's Note: For a more comprehensive explanation of focusing the efforts of subordinates, see "Planning & Implementation (Focus of Effort and Main Effort)" (The Tactical Edge, Fall 1996, p. 75).*

**California Woman Named to Top SWAT Post at LASD**

By Mike Parker

Cathy A. Taylor, a 24-year veteran of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, was recently promoted to the rank of Captain by Sheriff Lee Baca, and assumed command of the Department's Special Enforcement Bureau.

Captain Taylor's career with the Sheriff's Department began in 1974 as a deputy sheriff trainee.

Both as a deputy then sergeant, Taylor worked in patrol and as a staff instructor at the Training Academy.

As a deputy she also worked in the Custody Division and in the Discovery Unit of the Internal Affairs Bureau.

As a lieutenant, Captain Taylor worked in patrol as a watch commander followed by a stint as operations lieutenant at the Lomita Station. In 1996, she was assigned to the Special Enforcement Bureau where she worked as SWAT commander, operations lieutenant, and canine lieutenant.

Captain Taylor holds an associate of arts degree from Long Beach City College.

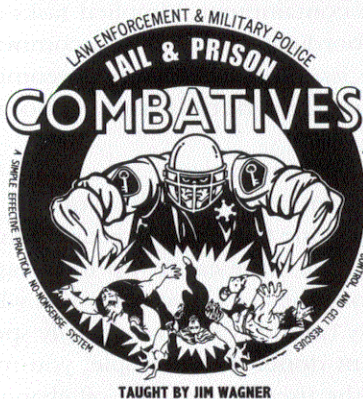
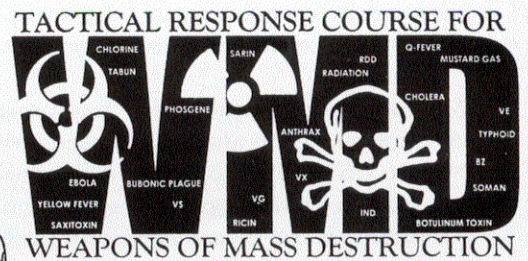
She resides in Long Beach with her husband of 30 years, Lt. James Taylor of Century Station.

They have two sons, Guy, 29, a deputy sheriff assigned to Carson Station, who is married with two children, and Matt, 27, a high school educator and football, basketball and volleyball coach. In her spare time, Capt. Taylor enjoys jogging, boating to Catalina Island, snow skiing and traveling with her husband.

*Mike Parker is a sergeant at the LASD.  
(American Police Beat)*

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