

# THE MUSICIANS OF MARS

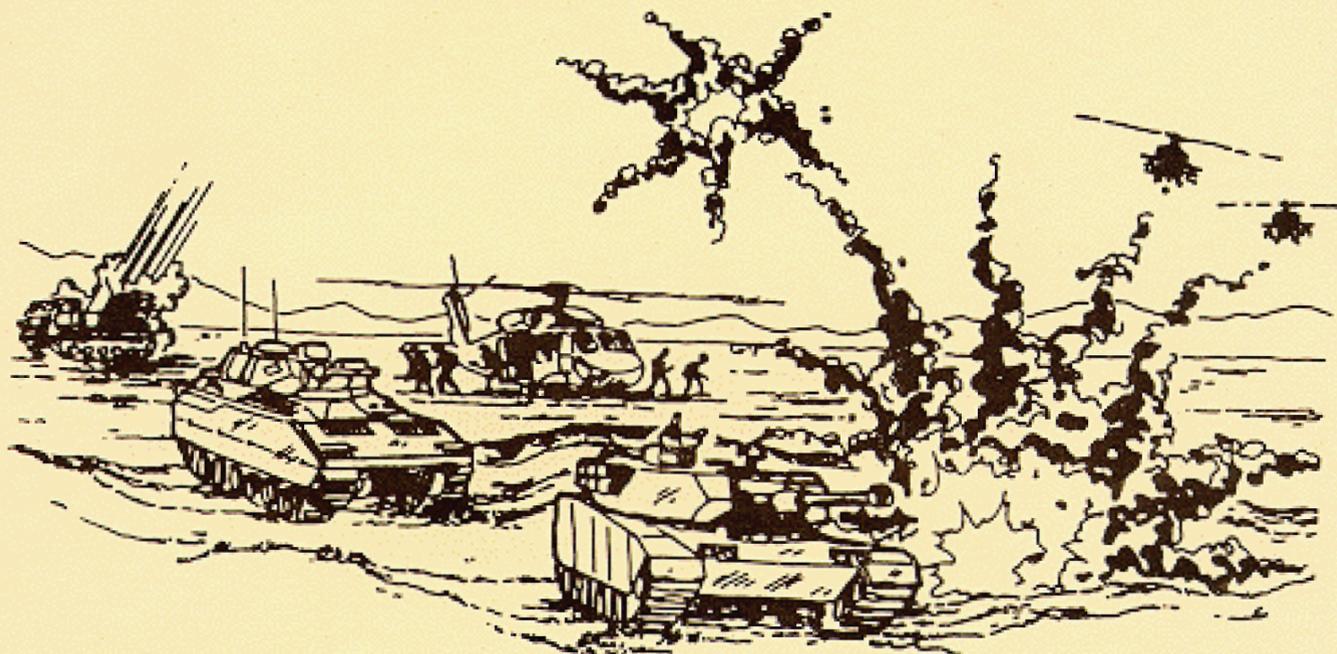
A STORY OF SYNCHRONIZATION  
FOR THE COMPANY/ TEAM COMMANDER

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JUNE 1990

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COMBINED ARMS TRAINING ACTIVITY  
CENTER FOR ARMY LESSONS LEARNED  
FORT LEAVENWORTH

**THE MUSICIANS OF MARS**  
A STORY OF SYNCHRONIZATION FOR THE COMPANY/TEAM COMMANDER  
JUNE 1990

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**SUMMARY**

## PREFACE

The question of why some units are more successful than others is frequently asked at all levels in today's Army. The intent of the question is to identify and quantify critical aspects of the battlefield on which current and future commanders can focus and train to do well. That a unit is able to execute specific tasks to doctrinal standards does not guarantee success. A commander must be able to not only execute tasks to standard, he or she must integrate or synchronize the tasks to achieve a specific intent.

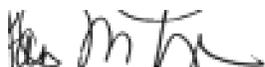
The term "synchronization" is commonly used to describe the actions that must occur at critical times and places to achieve an intended outcome. Synchronization requires planning, training, and practice.

The conductor of an orchestra must synchronize all of the instruments in an orchestra in order for the musical sounds to become a symphony. No matter how well each of the instruments in the orchestra is played, without the synchronization of all the instruments an orchestra produces a cacophony of musical sound instead of a symphony. Before an orchestra creates a symphony, each of the musicians must learn, practice, and rehearse their respective pieces. It is the conductor who brings all of the musicians and instruments together to produce the symphony.

Commanders on the battlefields of today and tomorrow, like conductors of fine orchestras, must plan, train, practice, and rehearse to synchronize their "Musicians of Mars" to produce the symphony of war. GEN Patton's "Harmony" of 1941 is "Synchronization" of today's Air/Land Battle.

The following pages tell a story of synchronization from the maneuver team commander's perspective. It is not intended to be the perfect solution, rather a story showing the critical tasks that most commonly cause units to not meet their training objectives. The characters and the battles are fictional, the story is not. The successes and failures are found everyday as units around the world train for their concert with Mars. Our intent is for the reader to finish with a better understanding of synchronization and how better to prepare themselves and their soldiers to become "Musicians of Mars".

JAMES M. LYLE  
Brigadier General, USA  
Commander



“THERE IS STILL A TENDENCY IN EACH SEPARATE UNIT...

TO BE A ONE-HANDED PUNCHER. BY THAT I MEAN THE RIFLEMAN WANTS TO SHOOT, THE TANKER TO CHARGE, THE ARTILLERYMAN TO FIRE .... THAT IS NOT THE WAY TO WIN BATTLES. IF THE BAND PLAYED A PIECE FIRST WITH THE PICCOLO, THEN WITH THE BRASS HORN, THEN WITH THE CLARINET, AND THEN WITH THE TRUMPET THERE WOULD BE A HELL OF A LOT OF NOISE BUT NO MUSIC. TO GET HARMONY IN MUSIC EACH INSTRUMENT MUST SUPPORT THE OTHERS. TO GET HARMONY IN BATTLE, EACH WEAPON MUST SUPPORT THE OTHER. TEAM PLAY WINS. YOU MUSICIANS OF MARS .... MUST COME INTO THE CONCERT AT THE PROPER PLACE AND AT THE PROPER TIME.”

MG GEORGE S. PATTON, Jr  
FORT BENNING, GA. 1941

## **TM BAYONET (H+ 6 hours)**

As the smoke and dust began to settle on the battle position of TEAM BAYONET, the commander, CPT Jack Crafton, felt a painful silence around him ... a silence broken only by the random pop and crackle of ammunition burning within smoldering hulks that had once been his weapons of war.

As his mind slowly cleared, Crafton began to realize the enormity of what had happened to his team. The enemy motorized rifle battalion he and TM BAYONET had been ordered to defend against had sliced through them as if they were not even there. As Crafton began to search for a reason why, a thousand thoughts ran through his mind.

LTC Steven Bryant, the task force commander, had given TM BAYONET a very sound mission. They were to defend the center sector of the task forces' Battle Position DAUNTLESS. The terrain, weather, and the engagement areas were ideal for defending and destroying the enemy Motorized Rifle Regiment facing Bryants' task force.

The teams on either flank had held their ground and done their Jobs. Close air support, field artillery, and mortar fires had been devastating when the other teams needed them. Still, Crafton needed to know why his teams failure almost lost the day for Task Force BRYANT at BP DAUNTLESS.

Crafton had been confident before the battle. "Every task had been done to standard," he thought to himself. The engineers had done their job just as they were supposed to. He was pretty sure the platoons had positioned themselves exactly where he told them to be. All the leaders knew his battle plan; he had even asked them if they understood after their hurried rehearsal. They had completed most of the preparation work before the battle started. Almost everything was dug in with at least a few inches of overhead cover. Even ammunition, fuel, maintenance, and air support planning had gone well.

Still, in spite of everything he had done, something had failed miserably in their execution. It seemed nothing worked when it needed to or as it was planned. It nagged Crafton that once the battle began everything seemed to go against him and the team.

### **POINT:**

**Synchronization, or "Harmonizing" as General Patton described it, is the integration of all available assets at the right time and place on the battlefield. Synchronization does not necessarily occur just because each separate asset knows its job well.**

Crafton noticed that even his old trusty thermos had not worked right as he poured himself a tepid cup of coffee. He watched with detachment, as his hands began to shake. The coffee had no taste. As the first gulp hit his cotton-dry throat he choked.

A deafening silence surrounded Crafton. Staring into the coffee cup he began to see the young faces of the soldiers he lost. Each looked older than their years. Each begged him to know why they had died. He could not answer.

The saving grace for the task force, Crafton thought, was when LTC Bryant had been able to conduct a last minute counter attack with Team SABRE. They had crushed the enemy force that had laid waste to his team. Crafton was relieved the attack had been stopped before the defense of BP DAUNTLESS was overrun. It seemed ironic to him that CPT Tom Bolten and TM SABRE had made it look so easy when they punched into the enemy force and shattered them much like the enemy had done to Craftons' team. Why did it have to be TM SABRE that had saved the day?

Why had this happened to TM BAYONET? They were well trained and disciplined, Crafton thought to himself. The equipment was good, modern, and well maintained. Why had someone else been able to do the job he had been unable to accomplish?

As the survivors from TM BAYONET began to pick up the battered pieces of the team around him, the destruction and carnage of the battle began to haunt him. Throwing down the cold dregs of his coffee, Crafton began to slowly move around the devastated battle position. The revulsion of what he saw began to make him ill. Fear of not knowing the cause of their defeat kept him moving. He had to find the answer. He had to know.

Could he be the reason? Were there flaws in his plan? Was someone to blame? Was their preparation inadequate, or was it just bad luck? Why didn't everything come together the way the battalion commander had described in the Operations Order? What happened? Why? What should they have done differently? Crafton needed answers, and the enemy would not wait.

Had LT Flynn, the S-2, given him the right picture of the battlefield? It seemed to Crafton that the enemy was everywhere but where he wanted them to be. No, he thought, even the scouts reported the enemy formations just as Flynn briefed the commanders and staff.

The Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) had seemed complete and thorough. Maybe, Crafton thought, Flynn and that "boy wonder" platoon leader, LT Jacobson, were wrong and he had in fact faced a much larger force. It bothered him that he had been defeated so easily. Crafton had never lost anything to anybody before, and this hurt. Crafton realized that "maybe's" would not give him the answers he needed to tell to the soldiers he had lost.

As he walked around the shattered remains of the battle position of Second Platoon, the weight of the battle settled on him. Even simple thought required tremendous energy .... something he did not have any more. Crafton sat down next to the burned-out shell of the M-2, that had belonged to LT Wyse, the platoon leader. Both had died to enemy jet fighters and attack helicopters that descended on the platoon a half hour before the battle started. Crafton's Stinger team never even saw them, much less had a chance to fire a missile before the damage was done. Staring into the still smoldering pyre, Crafton began to think about the battle.

Crafton had to know why his tanks, Bradleys and ITVs, had not been able to hit, much less kill, the multitude of enemy vehicles in the engagement area. Crafton pulled his crumpled map out of the side pocket of his tattered BDU pants and began to study it.

Crafton thought to himself, "The engagement area we had been given by the S-3 appeared to be well thought out. I did have to reposition the platoons for better cover and concealment once they actually got on the ground. After all, you always have to do that. Besides, everything was exposed if they would have gone where MAJ Daniels had wanted them to go."

Thinking back to his Officer Advance Course (OAC), Crafton remembered something he had saved. Somewhere in his battlebook LTC Bryant had insisted they make and carry with them, he had stuck a handout with the effective engagement ranges for his direct fire weapons. After a few minutes of digging through the little pocket sized book, he found it. It showed 3000 meters as the effective range of the M1, Main Battle Tank. With his minds eye, he traced on the map an arc 3000 meters to the front of both tank platoon battle positions.

A sick feeling came over him as he realized most of the engagement area was well beyond the range of their guns. Frantically, he searched the table for the ranges of all his direct fire weapons systems. As he found them, he traced the range arcs on his tattered map. All with the same haunting story.

By repositioning his platoons for better cover, and concealment, Crafton realized he had put them into positions that prevented them from killing the enemy force while they were in most of the engagement area. Worst of all, nobody realized it before the battle. If they did nobody reported it.

**POINT:**

**The company/team commander and platoon leaders must focus on the engagement area when organizing a defense. Positioning of weapons, obstacles and indirect fires must allow for the massing of fires on the enemy while they are in the engagement area.**

A chill shook his tired body. "Why had nobody caught the mistake?" Crafton was sure everyone knew where the engagement area was. "Didn't the platoons set up their Target Reference Points? What about range cards? Didn't anybody check them before the battle? Something should have keyed somebody that they could not reach the engagement area before the battle started!"

Crafton angrily rubbed the stubble on his face, thinking aloud, “Maybe, if I had been able to take the time to walk each of the battle positions with the platoon leaders I might have been able to catch the mistake. If I had required every one to tell me how they were going to fight the battle during the briefbacks, I could have checked to make sure they had understood my plan, and I had understood theirs.” He thought to himself, “Maybe the platoon leaders had not had or taken the time to walk the positions with their NCOs; after all, they were just as busy as I was.”

**POINT:**

**Rehearsals and backbriefs are key to synchronization. They surface disconnects in the plan. Shortfalls noted in rehearsals must be fed back up the chain of command. The basic plan may be flawed and may require change. There is no substitute for personal recon... walking the line. The map is often subtly, fatally wrong.**

Realizing there were still questions to be answered, Crafton began to replay each catastrophe that had befallen TM BAYONET. Even though they could not kill the enemy in the engagement area, he wondered why his platoons had not been able to deliver accurate fires when the enemy did come into range. It should have been easy for them to hit what they shot at. “Sure”, he thought to himself, we did kill a few of them, but it seemed like we fired a lot of rounds before we hit anything.

Thinking back to those miserable days at the National Training Center, Crafton began to think out loud to himself about what his platoon Observer/Controllers had told him, “Boresighting is absolutely and positively critical to maximizing the accuracy of the fire control systems.”

One of the OPFOR (Opposing Force) commanders Crafton knew from OAC had once bragged to him about the OPFOR boresighting four or five times a day, especially just before a battle. Crafton had once chided him about wasting all that time. Maybe it was not such a waste of time after all. Crafton began to wonder if his young lieutenants and platoon sergeants had taken time to make sure everything was boresighted. He wasn't even sure boresighting was a requirement in team TACSOP, and if it was, when and how often. Crafton began to wonder if maybe the OC's had been right after all.

**POINT:**

**Boresighting and pre-fire checks must be part of unit every SOP's, and be enforced.**

What had happened to the obstacles the engineers had worked on so hard? The enemy had gone through them as if they had not even been there. Crafton looked out at the engagement area and saw the remains of them, mumbling to himself, “Why had nobody seen the enemy force breaching and reducing the obstacles? Why didn't anyone try to fire on the breaching force while they were in the obstacles?”

Crafton knew he had repositioned a couple of the obstacles to make better use of the terrain. He had even reported the changes and the new locations of the obstacles to the task force S-3. Why had they failed to stop the enemy?

During the battle, Crafton remembered, he had told his Team Fire Support Officer to put steel on one critical obstacle. It was being breached in front of the Mech Platoon that had been destroyed in the air attack. Crafton shook his head. That incompetent FSO of his had called in the fire mission 500 meters from the enemy force. The impacting rounds fire had done nothing to stop the enemy force trying to breach the obstacle. As he looked out to where the powerful shells landed, Crafton realized his FSO had put them in where the original obstacle had been planned before it had been moved.

Crafton began to wonder why the Direct Support Artillery had not moved the target when he moved the obstacle. Why didn't his Team or Task Force FSO update the target location? Crafton's stomach knotted up as he realized he never told his FSO he had moved some of the obstacles around. Crafton began to wish he had included his FSO in the rehearsal. Maybe, he thought to himself, he was the incompetent one, not the FSO.

**POINT:**

**Include everyone in rehearsals. Changes in obstacle locations must be reported to everyone.**

Crafton began to examine each of the obstacles around the battle position, comparing them against the target list he had received from CPT McBride, the Task Force FSO. He checked locations and looked to see if each target had an observer assigned to call fires. Crafton sensed something was not right. Most of the locations were pretty close, except for the targets planned on the obstacles he had moved. As he stood up and moved closer to the smoldering Bradley, Crafton began to look for one of the obstacles for which the Second Platoon Fire Support Team Chief was responsible for calling fires on. Crafton could not see it. Thinking to himself, "It wouldn't have mattered anyway. The FIST Chief had died along with LT Wyse in the Bradley during the air attack."

**POINT:**

**Every obstacle must have someone assigned as a shooter ... and not just the FIST or FSO. The shooter must know radio frequencies, target numbers, and alternate comms means. Every obstacle must have someone assigned to see it and secure it from breaching/reduction by dismounted forces.**

Crafton asked himself "Why didn't we put the observers where they could see the obstacles, or have patrols check each one periodically? Why didn't the platoon leader check? Why didn't somebody else know to call fires on the obstacle when they knew the Mech Platoon FIST Chief was dead?" The answer hit him, the fire support execution matrix had not assigned anyone to fire the targets if the primary observed didn't or couldn't shoot.

Crafton became angry, mostly with himself; he had heard people drone for years about making sure each target had someone designated to shoot it, as well as someone to back up each shooter, and also to make sure that both observers were positioned to see their targets. Crafton had always wished they would shut up and leave him alone and not bother him with the details of fire support. “After all that's what the FSO is for. Now he wished he still had his FSO and everyone else who was gone.

It didn't make Crafton feel any better to find answers to some of his questions. Each answer seemed to produce more questions and more guilt. Crafton slowly walked over to what remained of the battle position of Third Platoon, one of his tank platoons. The young lieutenant leading the platoon had inadvertently called artillery fire on his own vehicles as they moved to get into the fight. They never got there.

Crafton began to replay Third Platoons part of the battle again. He remembered telling LT Smithson to reposition his tanks to fill the gap that was created with the loss of Second Platoon. He remembered the confusion in Smithson's voice as he jammed the radio net with questions about the enemy.

Crafton shook his head remembering how the unfortunate young man found the enemy tanks trying to breach an obstacle in front of the position he was moving into. In his haste, Smithson forgot the target reference number for the artillery target on the obstacle. He had called for fire with a grid location. Unfortunately for him and his platoon the grid he sent was his own. Before Smithson and the other soldiers of Third Platoon realized something was wrong, 144 rounds in six volleys of armor busting, 155mm, Dual Purpose, Improved Conventional Munitions mixed with High Explosive rounds rained down on them.

Crafton looked around in disbelief at the devastation and destruction his own artillery had inflicted on the platoon. Half the tanks had been knocked out. The blast from one HE round had taken half a gun tube, both front sprockets, and the drivers hatch off of a tank without the round striking it. The round had impacted a few feet away. Nothing at any Combat Training Center could have prepared them for this.

The surviving remnants of the platoon had still been in shock from the concussion a few minutes later when the enemy tanks and fighting vehicles breached the obstacle and attacked them. They could not defend themselves from the onslaught.

All Crafton could do now for Third Platoon was to make sure the few surviving members of the platoon were treated and evacuated as quickly as possible.

**POINT:**

**Rehearse in day; rehearse at night; rehearse in MOPP 4; rehearse with simulated jammed commo; rehearse, rehearse, rehearse**

In despair, Crafton began making his way back to his Command Post. “ Why had this happened?”, he thought. He had thought the team had done everything just as he had learned in OAC; but on reflection, had they? “ The vehicle and individual fighting positions had looked like something out of a field manual; yet they didn't keep anybody or anything from being killed. The use of terrain for cover and concealment had been good; yet the enemy still found them before they could find the enemy. Obstacles were well built and indirect fires timely; yet they never seemed to do what they were supposed to. Why? Had nobody seen the problems with the engagement area, or with anything else?”

Crafton began to wish he had spent more time checking things before the battle instead of assuming everyone else was. Time, he thought, would have given him the opportunity to look at everything a little closer.

Back at his Command Post, Crafton stumbled on the sand table model of the battle position his driver and NBC NCO had so carefully constructed for the rehearsal. Surprisingly, it was intact, save a few scattered artillery fragments. Crafton, staring at it, began to realize they had only gone through the motions during their rehearsal.

The platoon leaders echoed everything just as it was in the operations order. Nobody had questioned anything. Nobody had actually looked at the battle position from the enemy perspective. Worst of all, nobody had checked their planned positions against where they actually were on the ground. Nobody had looked at how they fit into the team plan, or what they would do if the enemy did not show up exactly when and where predicted.

**POINT:**

**Rehearsals must be done to standard. If not met, do it again. Elevate problems up the chain of command.**

Realizing he had found another failure, Crafton sat down on a fallen tree and began to assess what had to be done next. This battle was over but there would be more. He knew he had to do things differently.

Crafton reflected on the training he received in OAC and all the other military schools he had attended. The training had been excellent, but like so many of his peers, he had done things differently in the “Real World”. Now he began to see why each school had placed more emphasis on many of the less glamorous aspects of the battle than others. Now in defeat he understood the doctrine, tactics, and fundamentals were correct.

Crafton wanted to make sure the lessons he learned from this battle did not get filed away like the other ones. These had been hard and expensive, and his soldiers had paid the bill.

**TASK FORCE BRYANT**  
**Tactical Operations Center**  
**(H-24 hours)**

As LTC Bryant, the task force commander, wrapped up the warning order and backbriefs, CPT Tom Bolten did not relish the idea TM SABRE would be the task force reserve for this battle. He was confident his team was well prepared for the fight. It just didn't seem fair the other teams would have a chance to prove themselves before TM SABRE got into the fight. Bolten began to wonder why Bryant seemed to always make them his reserve.

The Warning Order Bryant issued seemed pretty easy to understand. Bolten was fairly certain he knew and understood what his commander intended TM SABRE to do. As the meeting was breaking up, Bolten walked up to LTC Bryant and asked if he had a couple of minutes to spare so they could go over the commanders intent and concept one more time just to make sure he had heard and understood everything correctly.

CPT Jack Crafton, the commander of the TM BAYONET, had frequently chided Bolten about always running to the Task Force commander after every order and asking him to go over it again with him. Bolten thought to himself, "Crafton thinks I'm scared and insecure for always checking. He thinks everyone should be just like him. A legend in his own mind." Bolten shrugged the thought off; he had work to do. This one was for all the marbles, and he didn't want to risk screwing it up because of false pride. He wanted to make sure he had not missed a critical part of what the commander wanted him and his team to do.

**POINT:**

**Clearly understand, beyond doubt, the commander's intent. Don't let false pride cost soldiers' lives! The best method of insuring complete understanding of commanders intent is to briefback the order, concept and intent to the individual issuing the order. Briefback should occur immediately following the order.**

The order was simple enough; TM SABRE would be the task force reserve. On order, they would be prepared to counterattack against any force penetrating past any of the three teams defending task force BP DAUNTLESS.

TM SABRE task organized with two mechanized platoons equipped with M-2 Bradleys IFV's, and two armor platoons equipped M-1 Abrams. They would not have a Stinger Team, it had been allocated to TM MUSKET. TM MUSKET faced a greater air defense threat in the eyes of the TF commander. If ordered to counterattack, TM SABRE would have priority of mortar and artillery fires to support them.

LTC Bryant was glad to answer Bolten's questions. Bolten wanted to know where his air defense coverage would come from if he had to move out of the ADA umbrella the Stinger team in HHC afforded him. "Good Question" replied Bryant. He thought for a minute, and called his Stinger Platoon Leader to help him come up with a solution.

Bolten expressed his concern about the indirect fire coordination. He felt it had not been clearly discussed during the orders brief. Bryant summoned the task force Fire Support Officer, CPT McBride, and instructed him to work out the details and to make sure the Team FSO, FIST NCO's, guns, and the ground commanders knew exactly what, when, and how things would work. McBride saluted and charged back into the M-577 that served as the task force FSE, to begin working on the problems.

Satisfied his questions were answered and he understood his mission and orders, Bolten gathered his map, overlay, and notebook and headed out of the Tactical Operations Center for his HMMWV and the ride back to his tactical assembly area.

Bryant leaned back in his folding chair and smiled to himself, knowing he had made the right choice for his reserve force. "Sure," he thought to himself, "all the team commanders were pretty good, each in their own way. Each with their strengths and weaknesses, but Bolten had something intangible". Bryant knew he could count on Tom Bolten in a pinch. He didn't look or act special. He was not one of those guys who looked like he had just stepped out of a recruiting poster. He was just solid as a rock. Bryant knew that Bolten and TM SABRE knew the fundamentals of armed combat cold, and had established training standards to achieve them.

Bolten had several strengths some of his peers often considered weaknesses. He had enough confidence in himself to not be afraid to ask questions before he started something new. Others thought he was insecure. He always seemed to be more interested in function than form. Bolten was not flashy. He never had to tell anybody how good he was, everyone could see it for themselves.

Bryant thought back a few months during the final preparation for their last Annual General Inspection. Bolten had volunteered his company to be the last unit to have its vehicles repainted by the Logistics Center with the new kind of paint. While everyone else fought to be first, Bolten had told the battalion XO he wanted more time to have the crews and maintenance sections work on the vehicles before they were painted. They eventually got painted, but the extra maintenance time seemed to really help during the inspection.

LTC Bryant had never heard Bolten yell at any of his Lieutenants or NCO's. He always treated them with respect. He was always able to communicate with them. The soldiers knew they could talk to him. He didn't always change his mind, but they knew he listened to them. Bolten had his finger on the pulse of TM SABRE.

**POINT:**

**Decentralization and initiative cannot exist without mutual confidence. Communication is a two way proposition. Without trust and communications, a commander will not get the info he needs to make proper decisions.**

One of the other team commanders had even asked the battalion Executive Officer if they were intentionally stacking Boltens' company with only the best people, and sending the rest to the other teams. Boltens NCO's always seemed to outshine the rest. Silently Bryant shook his head. He knew that every one got their fair share. Several of Bolten's NCO's were guys that had not worked out in other companies. Nobody seemed to remember that, after Bolten turned them into superstars. Bryant knew the soldiers would not let Bolten down, because he would not let them down.

Bryant got up from his chair. He had work to do. The battle would be starting in less than 24 hours and he and the staff had a lot of work to do if they were to be successful.

On the way back to his CP at the assembly area, Bolten called LT Tim Kelly, the team Executive Officer, and let him know something important was up. Bolten told Kelly to assemble the orders group right away. As Bolten's HMMWV pulled up to the CP, Kelly could tell his commander appeared a little bit disappointed at whatever it was. As Bolten got out of the HMMWV, he told his driver to get the XO and FSO right away. He needed to talk to them before he met with the platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and other members of his "Orders Group."

During the ride back to the position, Bolten had reviewed the mission. Bolten felt uncomfortable and he was not sure why. He reflected back a few months earlier when they had been given a similar mission during a Combat Training Center rotation. LTC Bryant had given him the order to counter attack, only to have everything go to pieces. The OPFOR blew through the entire Task Force as if they were not even on the battlefield. Bolten realized he was afraid of repeating his mistakes. During his long ride to the assembly area, Bolten also had reviewed his notes about each of the other teams' missions and sectors.

Bolten remembered LT Flynn, S-2, had told him the enemy regiment would most likely concentrate its attack in the TM MUSKET sector; they also expected TM BAYONET and LANCE to each face motorized rifle battalions with artillery and air in supporting attacks.

Flynn had indicated they had identified two likely routes and another possible route on which the enemy force could be expected to try to penetrate BP DAUNTLESS. MAJ Daniels, the S-3, had interrupted to say LT Jacobson had his Scouts out trying to confirm the IPB. The enemy routes were Priority Intelligence Requirements for the task force.

On the way back, Bolten studied his map concentrating on the areas Flynn had identified. Something else had caught his eye. Staring at the map he thought he saw a fourth route he might have used if he were doing the attacking. He made a note to check with Flynn. He also made a mental note to have each of his platoon leaders look at the routes, including the one he thought he saw during their reconnaissance, "just to be sure."

**TEAM SABRE**  
**(Tactical Assembly Area)**  
**(H-22 hours)**

Before going into the CP, Bolten gave the overlay to Kelly, and LT O'Neil, his new Team Fire Support Officer. Bolten wanted to give them a jump on getting the overlay copied for everyone, and to get the guys started on the sand table they would need later during their rehearsal.

To Bolten, it always seemed to take him longer to plan and issue orders and instructions than the other team commanders. They had sometimes teased him about being too methodical, because; "Everyone knew all plans would change once the battle started."

He had been taught a long time ago it was more important to give all of the information he had to his subordinates, than to hold bits and pieces. Some of his contemporaries believed giving up information was the same as giving up power.

Bolten knew information was critical to decision making. If he required his subordinates to keep coming back for instructions or information it could lead to misunderstanding at a critical time and worse yet they would not learn to make critical decisions on their own.

"Yeah", he thought, he'd taken a few lumps from MAJ Daniels and LTC Bryant along the way for some of the decisions his young leaders had made, but if they never learned how to make decisions in training they would not be able to do it when they had to. When someone's life was at stake. Now was the time for him to find out if his subordinate leaders had learned from their mistakes.

Because of the time needed to plan and prepare for the mission, Bolten realized he alone could not do everything himself. "Besides," he thought to himself, "we have practiced for a long time to get people ready to lead their soldiers. Now was not the time to lose confidence in their abilities."

**POINT:**

**Junior leaders will exercise initiative only if they have developed experience and confidence by "doing". Initiative and confidence can't be developed overnight. Commanders must underwrite subordinates mistakes as the price of learning.**

As the TM SABRE Orders Group began to gather around their commander, Bolten could feel both their confidence and their fear as they joked and teased with each other. "Too bad," he thought to himself, "it doesn't seem fair these guys would not be the first ones to test their skills against the enemy force."

As the group settled in, Bolten began by giving everyone a complete run down of some information and orders he had received from LTC Bryant. Before he could issue orders he knew they had to build a plan, and the best plan is one that is developed by the people who must execute it. The first step was to lay out a time line. This reduced the chance for misunderstanding.

**POINT:**

**Establish a time line that includes all critical events. Stick to it religiously. Time management is essential to effective planning and preparation.**

Bolten had learned a valuable lesson as a company Executive Officer. He saw months of hard work dissolve in a matter of weeks after he moved on to a new job in the battalion. The guy who replaced him as XO had tried to do everything himself. When they failed he was the first to blame someone else. Within a few months his company went from being one of the top companies in the division to one of the worst.

**POINT:**

**Doing all oneself simply will not work. There may be shortterm success; but in the long run only disaster will result. Give subordinates responsibilities, train them to standard, give them authority, and hold them accountable.**

As Bolten issued his planning guidance to those eager young faces, it struck him that they really wanted to do well, not necessarily for themselves, but for the people around them. As Bolten and the others worked through each phase of the battle, the plan began to take shape. By focusing on what each part of the team was responsible for accomplishing during the battle and the planning and preparation for the battle, they made a point of identifying what everyone could expect of each part of the team, and what each part could expect from the other during each phase of the battle. Different courses of action were tested, analyzed, and tried. Throughout the entire process the group remained focused on one single thing: The mission of defending BP DAUNTLESS.

As he wrapped up the planning meeting, and completed issuing his orders, Bolten asked if anybody had any questions. Satisfied, they had been answered, Bolten stood up straight and told his platoon leaders he wanted each of them to take a few minutes with their platoon sergeants and discuss the orders and the mission, and then he wanted both of them to backbrief him on the mission as they understood it, and how they would execute it.

Knowing time was short, Bolten had given each platoon an attack route they were responsible for coordinating, reconning, preparing and checking. He would also do his own reconnaissance of each route as a precaution and to help the platoon leaders who might have missed something. Two sets of eyes are better than one.

Each platoon also was assigned two attack routes in support of another platoon they were to prepare. Bolten made it clear they were to make a special point of coordinating with the forward teams and conducting a route reconnaissance from the Battle Position as far forward as OPSEC would allow.

Bolten wanted each platoon leader to know and be able to tell him how far it was; how long it took to get out of each position and move to another at night and in MOPP IV; how and where they would engage the enemy force; how, where, and when they would use mortars, artillery, and close air support if they got it. He wanted to know what they would do if they didn't get it. Bolten wanted to know how they would use smoke to obscure and screen their movement and positions; what effect the task force obstacles had on their movement and mobility, and even how they would treat and evacuate their casualties during and after the battle.

Bolten knew there were a lot of questions he wanted them to be able to answer. Better they find out before the battle something doesn't work than during the battle.

The backbriefs were finished when Bolten was satisfied each of the platoon leaders and their platoon sergeants understood their missions. He sent them out to complete preparing their platoons for battle. Bolten grabbed his thermos out of the HMMWV and drew out a steaming cup of coffee.

Finding Kelly and O'Neil crouched over a map, Bolten walked over and sat down with them. After taking a sip of coffee, Bolten looked at Kelly and said, "We have our work cut out for us. I need you and First Sergeant Johnson to make sure everybody has all their ammo, and maintenance, chow, and the other admin stuff taken care of as soon as possible. Check compliance with the Pre-Combat Checks in our TACSOP, especially make sure everyone has boresighted their weapons. Every round must count!"

"Make sure the medics get around and check everybody out. I know some of the guys may have some minor problems they need taken care of. Make sure they also recon the routes for evacuating our casualties.

Also, have the 1SG call the S-1 and see if we can get the mail early. Also if we can get the chaplain to come by for a bit. Some of the guys might like to see and talk with him before everything gets hot. We need everybody focusing on getting ready, not worrying about other problems."

Taking another sip of coffee, Bolten continued, "XO when you're done I need you to set up a rehearsal. We need a couple hours for the platoons to get ready. They need to finish their reconnaissance, preparations, rehearsals, and coordination with each other as well as the other teams before we do ours.

“As I told everyone we can expect the battle to start around 0400 tomorrow morning. That gives us about 21 hours to get ready. Lets plan on the rehearsal at 1430. That will give us some time to fix or let the S-3 know of any problems that we find. MAJ Daniels and LTC Bryant have a task force rehearsal at 1600, and we need to be ready.”

“If we have time this evening, when it is just about as dark as it will be at 0400, I want to have another rehearsal. This time I want to have everyone actually drive the routes they might have to use. You will need to coordinate with both MAJ Daniels, and with the other three team Commanders. Also make sure the fuel truck gets everyone topped off after the rehearsal. Better get the mechanics around at the same time to check everything one last time.”

“If they can do it while its dark, they should be able to do it as it gets light.”

Bolten looked up at Kelly and O'Neil saying , “FSO, I want you and the XO to run the rehearsal, I will be the enemy force during the rehearsal. I need you guys ready to be prepared to take over if I can't run the battle for any reason. Both of you must be able to fight the battle the same way I would. We can't afford confusion. I am going to make the rehearsal as hard as I can on all of us. We must leave nothing to chance.”

“ You two need to be asking questions like; How long? How far? How many? Who will do it, fire it, or see it if you can't? Who will do it if they can't?”

“ We have to make this tougher than the actual battle. If we get to do the full up rehearsal tonight I want the same thing again. If we find any problems with the Task Force order we need to make sure we notify LTC Bryant and the S-3. Understand?”

Both Kelly and O'Neil nodded their heads and replied, “Yes, Sir.”

Finishing up his coffee, Bolten got up and moved over to where 1SG Johnson was standing.

“Top, let's go do our pre-combat inspection of the platoons. I need you to make sure everyone knows what is going on. Make sure the NCO's are doing their pre-combat checks. We also need to make sure everyone gets chow and sleep. Tomorrow will be a long day, and everyone needs to be ready.”

As they walked out of the CP, Bolten's driver ran up saying, “ Sir, LTC Bryant called, He and MAJ Daniels need to see you right away. Something about the S-2's stuff on the routes, apparently the Scouts have some new information for everyone.”

Bolten looked at 1SG Johnson, and said, “ It never fails Top, you make a plan, then you have to change it. Top, I need you to look after things for a while. When I get finished at the TOC I am going to do my recon. I will call you if there are any significant changes that affect us. Please look after Second Platoon a little bit more than the others. LT Thorne is pretty new and I'm not sure he has learned his way around with the Platoon Sergeant. Talk to SFC Rose and let him know we want him to make sure he doesn't let Thorne do anything that might get the platoon in trouble. Please tell the XO I'll be back in a bit.”

Confident that things were on track, Bolten climbed into the HMMWV and headed off to the TOC to see LTC Bryant. Arriving a few minutes later, Bolten noticed some of the commanders and staff were gathering around the S-2's map. He decided he needed to get over there and see what was up.

**TASK FORCE BRYANT**  
**Tactical Operations Center**  
**(H-17 hours)**

Everyone stood up as LTC Bryant walked into the TOC. Looking around he noticed CPT Crafton from Team BAYONET was not there. Crafton had sent his XO who was already at the TOC talking to the S-4 and Maintenance Officer about problems in one of the platoons.

Bryant, a bit annoyed, and he made a mental note to talk to Crafton later about the importance of being there. It was all right to bring the XO along, but he was the commander and needed to know what was going on.

Crafton's XO, LT Paulson, told Bryant that his CO was tied up with the engineers trying to get some obstacles put in, and he would update his boss as soon as he got back to the battle position. Bryant hoped it would be before the battle started.

LT Flynn and MAJ Daniels provided a situation update to everyone. LT Jacobson, the Scout Platoon Leader had confirmed the third route, and had also found another route in the enemy could use into BP DAUNTLESS. Bolten smiled to himself. It was the same route he had called Flynn about earlier. The same route he had found during his analysis. Bolten told LTC Bryant he had already put LT Gregg from First Platoon on it.

**POINT:**

**Confirm the IPB. The IPB paints a picture of the battlefield. It provides confirmation of enemy intentions, and what the force looks like that you will face.**

Daniels said, "Things are running behind schedule. Because of this we will only be able to have a COMDEX for the rehearsal. It has been rescheduled for 1745 hours."

"So much for dinner." Bolten thought as he rolled his eyes up. Bolten looked at Bryant, who was obviously agitated at his S-3, Operations Officer. Daniels told everyone the updated Overlay and Target List for the Task Force was not finished, however everyone would receive a copy as soon as it was completed. Bryant bit down and shook his head from side to side. He was not a happy man. He recognized he had a problem with his S-3; a solution would have to wait until after the battle. He knew he needed to be in the TOC during the battle.

Bolten raised his hand and asked Daniels, "Sir, What's the signal you'll give me to execute my counter attack?"

Daniels replied, "I'll call you on the Task Force Command Net, and let you know where to go."

Unsatisfied with the answer he received, Bolten pressed the S-3 again asking “ What if that frequency doesn't work, or one of our radios is out? Who or what will let me know to start the counter attack if you can't reach me?”

The S-3 glared at Bolten and snorted, “We'll solve that problem later.”

Bryant realized Bolten needed an answer. He turned to Daniels. “ Bolten has a good point. If we can't get you by voice, we'll use wire.”

Turning around to the audience, Bryant ordered, “I want each team to run a wire line.”

“CESO I need a complete plan before we leave here. Understand?”

“ Yes, sir, I'll have one in a few minutes” replied CPT Jackson the Communication/ Electronics Officer for the task force.

LTC Bryant spoke up. “CESO, that's great. Make sure you have the Commo Platoon run a backup line to Bolten's position. Make sure they lay it along a different route.”

Bryant spoke up again “ Tom I want you to move a vehicle up to observe the Engagement Area. Make sure they can see the team battle positions. You might have to dismount an observer to do that. If they see an enemy company minus penetrate anywhere, and you have not heard anything assume both wire or radios are out and launch your counter attack. When you do, come up on the task force command net and announce “Thunder”. Do you understand my intent?”

“ Yes Sir. If my observers report any penetration of a force larger than a company minus I will counter attack. I will make a blind call on the command net if I don't here anything from the TOC to let everyone know we're moving. The code word is “Thunder”. Hopefully no one except the enemy will be surprised.”

**POINT:**

**Plan for contingencies. Have redundant systems in place, and rehearse their use before the battle starts. If you are not prepared you are doomed to fail.**

The Commander of TM MUSKET asked CPT McBride, the Task Force FSO, if there was a chance for them to get a PADS team from the Direct Support artillery battalion to come in and survey the battle positions, obstacles, and especially the OPs where they had Forward Observers and Combat Observation Lasing Teams located.

McBride replied, "I'll try. The PADS teams are pretty busy trying to get the artillery batteries and radars into position. We might be able to at least get them to survey the locations of the COLT teams. If we can get that we can use the G VLLD of the COLT teams to conduct a hasty survey for us. I am also trying to get them to survey the engagement area for us. I know my artillery battalion has requested an additional PADS team from DIVARTY to help us out."

Bryant stood up, gave everyone a quick word of encouragement, and dismissed them to go take care of business. He told MAJ Daniels he wanted to talk to him in private. He wanted to find out why things were going so slowly. Bryant felt he "owed" it to the teams to give them as much time as he could to get ready.

Bolten headed out to do his leaders reconnaissance, and then back to the position as quickly as he could. He called to let the XO know he needed to update everybody as soon as he got back.

**TEAM SABRE**  
**(Tactical Assembly Area)**  
**(H-12 hours)**

As he arrived, Bolten saw Kelly already had everyone gathered by the sand table being readied for the rehearsal later on. Quickly, Bolten went over the new information, including the new route information, and the actual locations of the obstacles being put in.

Turning to his FSO, Bolten reminded O'Neil to check the obstacles against the targets that were already planned. Turning to his Platoon Leaders, Bolten told them to check the grids of the other team battle positions and obstacles against the ones he had just given them and let him know if there were any discrepancies.

Bolten went over some other items from the TACSOP. He knew from experience the platoon leaders tended to overlook or short cut some items in training because they thought of them as "NCO Business". Things like boresighting, range cards and sector sketches.

Bolten remembered something his first Platoon Sergeant had taught him. "NCO Business" is a misused term. People use it to hide their laziness. Everybody has the right and responsibility to check the things their subordinates are responsible for. "If you don't check it won't be done." The same NCO had also made a point of teaching Bolten the difference between checking, and doing.

Bolten brought everyone up to speed on some of the things that LTC Bryant had the staff working on. He checked with everyone for questions, and to make sure everything was correctly understood. Satisfied everything was progressing at a reasonable pace Bolten dismissed everyone to get back to the business at hand.

As the group adjourned, 1SG Johnson walked up to Bolten. Bolten asked, "Top, how are things going?" Johnson answered that for the most part things were moving along as expected. Also he had talked to the S-1 and the Chaplain was going to be able to stop by around supper time with the mail.

Staring Bolten in the eye, Johnson said, "Sir, you need to eat and get some rest yourself. If you don't, you know none of your lieutenants will either, and if they don't nobody else will. Remember they watch everything you and I do. Besides, until the rehearsal, the NCOs need some time to take care of the things they have to do."

"Thanks Top" replied Bolten.

“ By the way, Sir, your driver got some hot chow and coffee for you. I also told him to get a place for you to rest in the medic track for a couple of hours. I hate to burst your bubble but you are not Superman, even if you did go to that fancy southern military college. That big gold ring of yours does not make you immune to being hungry or tired.”

Bolten smiled and shook his head. “Thanks again Top.”

A few minutes before the rehearsal was to begin Bolten got up and made his way back to the CP. He had not slept well, and the T-ration Lasagna was sitting in a lump in the pit of his stomach. It didn't matter much though, everybody in the team knew the First Sergeant had threatened to dismember anybody who disturbed Bolten with anything less important than the imminent end of the world. The world had not ended. Everyone was trying to figure out how the “Old Man” could be calm enough to sleep just a few hours away from their first battle. They thought he was amazing, so cool under stress.

The rehearsal started on time. It was obvious Bolten had been right about LT Thorne, in Second Platoon. As the XO and FSO grilled him on how and who and what he was to do he seemed to get flustered quickly. When Thorne did get flustered his platoon sergeant would look at him confidently and let him know he was doing all right. Bolten hoped Thorne would not be as nervous in the morning.

Every time one of the platoon leaders made a move, Bolten would counter with something unexpected to see if they had really looked at the battlefield. He wanted them to be able to think quickly and decisively. None could afford to hesitate.

The rehearsal was brutal. It had achieved its purpose. Several problems with the plan had been identified, as well several key weaknesses with platoon direct and indirect fire plans, routes into and out of positions, coordination between the platoons, and reactions to the enemy. The rehearsal took a little longer than originally planned, but it was time well spent. For every problem or weakness identified, a solution was sought and found.

Bolten decided they would make the time for the rehearsal at dusk. It was important to make sure the changes worked. By then, Bolten hoped Bryant would have things straightened out with Daniels and the staff. Bryant would not let him down. They would have the updated overlay and fire support execution matrix with the refined target list. The extra rehearsal would be a good time to check everything out one last time.

**TASK FORCE BRYANT**  
**Tactical Operations Center**  
**(H-30 minutes)**

At 0330 LT Jacobson's scouts reported large formations of enemy armored vehicles were moving toward BP DAUNTLESS. At the same time enemy aircraft and attack helicopters hit the forward edges of the battle position. The scouts reported they had called in artillery fires on several enemy reconnaissance elements, and on the forward elements of the attacking regiment in an effort to get their formations to deploy early. They also had reported they had fired on and destroyed several enemy artillery units occupying positions and preparing to fire.

The TOC came alive with the first sounds of battle. The first reports from the teams were of aircraft knocked from the sky by the Stinger gunners and by fires from their own weapons. Even as the reports of successes filtered in, it was obvious that something was going wrong. TM's LANCE and MUSKET had their hands full but were holding. Both teams reported they were receiving casualties and had lost several vehicles. The commanders reported they also were inflicting far more casualties than they were taking.

LTC Bryant was concerned he was not hearing anything on the battle nets of TM BAYONET. He could hear the crash of battle but nothing on the radio. He began to feel a knot tighten in his stomach. He knew something had to be wrong. It was unlike Jack Crafton to ever pass up an opportunity to tell everyone how successful he was.

Suddenly the radio crackled with the voice of Tom Bolten reporting what appeared to be a major penetration of TM BAYONET's battle position. At the same time the scouts reported the attacking force appeared to be shifting more toward TM BAYONET, and some of them had not yet deployed out of march formation.

Realizing the situation was rapidly disintegrating, Bryant radioed the Commander of TM SABRE and ordered him to counter attack against the enemy penetration. There was no response, just the piercing sound of an enemy jammer on the command net.

**TEAM SABRE**  
**(Tactical Assembly Area)**  
**(H+45 minutes)**

The observer Bolten had dismounted and placed over looking TM BAYONET's battle position saw the same penetration and signaled his commander with a blaze orange VS 17 panel. From his track on the reverse slope Bolten saw the signal through his binoculars. With a calm, decisive voice Bolten ordered the platoons to counterattack.

TM SABRE came alive as the counter attack order went out across the team position. Transmitting the code word "Thunder" in the blind, Bolten let the TOC know they were moving. LT Kelly tried to verify the order on the land line to the Task Force TOC. He wanted to make sure they did not have any surprises in store for them. There was no response. The exposed wire the wiremen forgot to dig in, had fallen victim to artillery fire.

LT Thorne and Second platoon would lead the counter attack with the first and fourth platoons in support. The young Lieutenant did not let his commander or platoon down.

## **ENGAGEMENT AREA GOLD**

**(H+90 minutes)**

The commander of the enemy regiment, after cutting into the defense so easily, could not believe what was happening. Every time one of his battalions or companies did something to extricate themselves from the hornets nest they found, something would hit them harder than before. Quickly, it became apparent they were trapped and their attack was doomed to fail. Every time one of his tanks fired into the counter attacking force several rounds would be returned with a vengeance. Vehicles all around him were erupting with blinding flashes as turrets disappeared.

As the battlefield around him turned to chaos, the commander slammed his fist down against the turret. Where was the enemy at? His force was being blown apart at the will of the defender. What ever the positions of the tanks and IFV he faced they had reduced his ability to acquire, fire, and maneuver without risking the destruction of each vehicle.

Obviously the prep fires his regimental artillery had not had much effect. Maybe those crafty tankers and infantry they were facing had used fake positions, or moved after the dismounted recon force had made their report.

Control of the regiment was lost. The remaining vehicles tried to move around the battlefield and avoid obstacles created by the smoke and fires of the disabled vehicles of the regiment. Everything began to jam up as the defending gunners deliberately picked their targets and dispatched them effortlessly.

As the regiment turned to pull out of the maelstrom a storm of artillery and mortar fire fell on them with devastating affect. The commander of the enemy regiment died as a TOW missile launched from LT Thorne's Bradley removed the turret of his tank.

**TASK FORCE BRYANT**  
**Tactical Operations Center**  
**(H+3 Hours)**

LTC Bryant began to relax as reports began to filter into the TOC that the defense had been reestablished and the penetration stopped.

TM SABRE had fought a hard fight. It had not been easy, like the other teams, they had paid a significant price for their victory. CPT Bolten had been wounded and LT Kelly, his XO, killed by enemy artillery that hit the Team Sabre CP as the enemy force desperately tried to get away.

Taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly, Bryant remembered why he had given the job to Bolten and TM SABRE.

Quiet began to spread across BP DAUNTLESS.

## SUMMARY

This short story was developed to emphasize the most critical synchronization tasks each company/team commander must accomplish to be successful on the battlefield. The importance of integrating and synchronizing available combat power cannot be stressed enough.

Throughout the story there are critical synchronization points identified for the reader. These points are not all inclusive. There are many equally important points left for the reader to pull out. In some cases, volumes could be or already have been written on specific synchronization points used in the story. Not enough can be said about the importance of any one specific task. Each is significant if success is the goal.

When this project started the commandants of the Infantry and Armor Centers identified eighteen offensive and nineteen defensive critical synchronization tasks. Three tasks were common to both offense and defense. These included:

a. Defense:

- 1) Prepare for Combat
- 2) Reconnoiter a Company Battle Position
- 3) Perform Fire Support Planning
- 4) Maintain Mobility/Bypass an Obstacle
- 5) Establish an Obstacle
- 6) Occupy a Battle Position
- 7) Coordinate Artillery Fires
- 8) Construct Survivability Positions
- 9) Prepare a Subsequent Company Team Battle Position
- 10) Develop a Company Team Fire Plan
- 11) Perform Logistical Planning
- 12) Organize a Company Team Engagement Area
- 13) Execute a Company Defensive Mission
- 14) Execute Fire Plan
- 15) Defend Against Air Attack (Active)
- 16) Displace To a Subsequent Battle Position
- 17) Perform Reserve/Counterattack/Force Activities
- 18) Reorganize
- 19) Provide Medical Evacuation and Treatment of Casualties

b. Offense:

- 1) Prepare for Combat
- 2) Perform Reconnaissance
- 3) Perform Tactical Movement
- 4) Perform Hasty River/Gap Crossing
- 5) Perform Passage of Lines
- 6) Perform Passage of Lines
- 7) Breach an Obstacle
- 8) Perform Assault Position Activities
- 9) Perform Attack Position Activities
- 10) Perform an Attack by Fire
- 11) Assault an Enemy Position (Mounted)
- 12) Assault an Enemy Position (Dismounted)
- 13) Employ Indirect Fire in the Offense
- 14) Defend Against Air Attack (Active)
- 15) Perform Logistical Planning
- 16) Consolidate on the Objective
- 17) Reorganize on the Objective
- 18) Provide Medical Evacuation and Treatment of Casualties

It is important to understand that everyone in an organization is responsible for synchronization. Individuals may know chapter and verse about each task but until they understand how each task is related to other tasks, synchronization cannot occur. There is no room on today's battlefield for someone to say "it was somebody else who should have synchronized it".

Training is the passport to synchronization. Synchronization training requires a systemic approach at all levels. Standards must be set and met. If training events do not include all elements of the combined arms team, training opportunities are wasted. An orchestra does not play a symphony until all the musicians are there and have practiced together. Training must be done the same way. Each part learns its portion, and practices; when each part knows its piece, all parts must come together and practice until harmony is achieved. Only then does the orchestra perform.

The Author