

FM 3-0

OPERATIONS



OCTOBER 2022

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HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

Initiative in the Absence of Orders – Naval Bombers at Midway

On 4 June 1942, American naval aviators, acting on initiative and without communications from higher echelon headquarters, struck a major blow in the Pacific War at the Battle of Midway. The Japanese First Air Fleet, known as *Kido Butai*, launched a massive raid against Midway Island, causing significant damage. The American carriers Hornet, Enterprise, and Yorktown launched unsynchronized strikes against *Kido Butai* by several different air groups. Once aloft these carrier groups were soon beyond radio range of their ships and had to rely on prior intelligence, intuition, and luck to find the enemy.

Lieutenant Commander John Waldron, commander of Torpedo 8 (Hornet), believed his air group commander was leading the group on an incorrect heading. He broke formation and led his squadron on another course. They found *Kido Butai* and attacked, but the entire squadron was shot down because it had no fighter cover. The torpedo bombers of Torpedo 6 (Enterprise) followed Waldron's squadron and also suffered heavy losses without scoring a hit. The dive bombers of Bombing 6 (Enterprise) and Scouting 6 (Enterprise) had launched earlier in the day and arrived at their designated coordinates without finding the enemy. Lieutenant Commander Clarence McClusky, commander of Bombing 6, could not radio back to the Enterprise for further orders. Exercising disciplined initiative, he began to search the area despite running low on fuel and found a Japanese destroyer, which he followed to *Kido Butai* just as Japanese fighters completed the destruction of Torpedo 8 and Torpedo 6. The Japanese fighters and anti-aircraft guns were entirely focused on the low altitude attacks from the torpedo bombers, leaving them vulnerable to a high-altitude dive-bombing run. McClusky ordered an attack by Bombing 6 which, by chance, occurred at the same time as Bombing 3 (Yorktown) arrived on the scene. The resulting action by two squadrons acting on their own initiative to carry out the mission fatally damaged three Japanese carriers, the Kaga, Akagi, and Soryu, which sank later in the day, putting the formerly outnumbered Americans at a 3:1 advantage in aircraft carriers.

The performance of commanders like Waldron and McClusky, out of contact with higher commands and acting on their own initiative, led to victory at Midway.

DRIVING THE OPERATIONS PROCESS

8-27. Commanders employ the operations process to incorporate coalition and joint partners, empower subordinate initiative, and to ensure authorities and risk acceptance are delegated to the appropriate echelon required for the situation. Staffs and subordinate headquarters earn the commander's trust by providing relevant information, anticipating needs, and directing supporting actions. (See ADP 5-0 for more information on the operations process and FM 6-0 for more on the role of commanders in operations.)

8-28. The major components of the operations process are planning, preparing, executing, and continuously assessing the operation. Planning normally begins upon receipt of orders from a higher echelon headquarters and continues through the execution of the operation. The commander and staff continually assess operations and revise the plan through fragmentary orders. Commanders, assisted by their chiefs of staff or executive officers, drive the preparation for an operation by allocating time, prioritizing resources, and supervising preparation activities such as rehearsals to ensure their forces are ready to execute operations. During execution, commanders and staffs focus their efforts on translating plans into direct action to achieve objectives in accordance with higher commander's intent. (See figure 8-1 on page 8-8 for a graphic depiction of the operations process.)

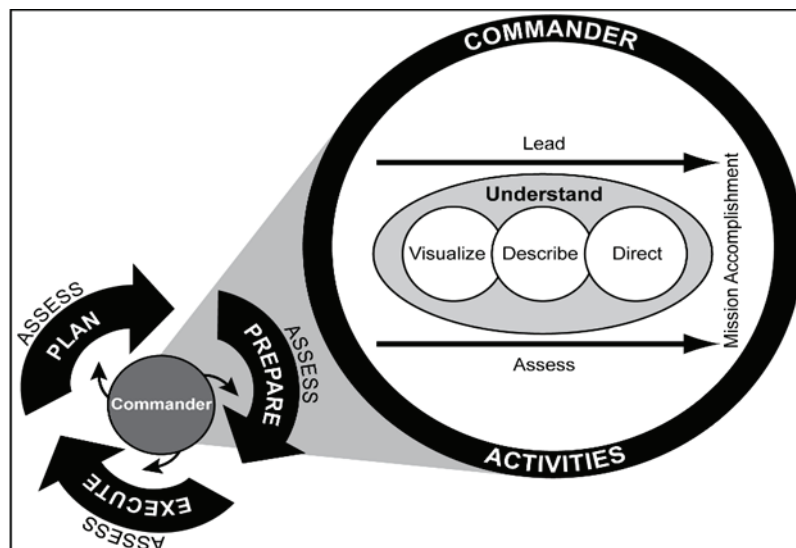


Figure 8-1. The operations process

UNDERSTAND

8-29. An operational environment includes portions of the land, maritime, air, space, and cyberspace domains encompassing the area of operations and area of interest, understood through three dimensions—human, physical, and information. Understanding how capabilities employed from each of the domains influence outcomes in the three dimensions is foundational to success during operations. Commanders communicate that understanding to subordinates. Commanders collaborate with their staffs, other commanders, and mission partners to accurately frame the operational environment encompassing the mission objectives. Commanders must be comfortable with a certain degree of uncertainty and ambiguity within an operational environment—delaying action while seeking perfect understanding may prevent a unit from exploiting a fleeting opportunity or make it vulnerable to enemy attack.

8-30. Commanders, supported by their operations and intelligence staff sections, direct the collection of information and allocate capabilities from as many domains as possible. They use operational and mission variables, intelligence preparation of the battlefield, and running estimates to help understand how capabilities in each domain affect operations on land and vice versa. Competent commanders circulate throughout their AORs as often as possible, collaborating with subordinate commanders and leaders while observing the situation for themselves. Subordinates often possess a deeper or more nuanced sense of the local situation or aspect of an operation than commanders. Direct exposure to conditions on the ground often allows them to detect trouble or opportunity before a higher echelon staff member does. Maintaining shared understanding is therefore a dynamic, ongoing process, since situations change as operations progress.

VISUALIZE

8-31. Commanders visualize a desired end state and potential solutions to solve or manage identified problems. Commanders look up, out, and down as they develop their visualization of an operational environment, relying on information and observations from superior and adjacent commanders, their staffs, and subordinate commanders. An operational approach may require capabilities provided by external organizations, and the effects delivered may be dependent on conditions in other domains.

DESCRIBE

8-32. Commanders describe their visualization to staffs and subordinate commanders to facilitate shared understanding and purpose. Through collaboration and dialogue, commanders ensure subordinates understand the visualization well enough to plan and conduct operations. Commanders continue to refine their visualization throughout the planning and execution of an operation and balance frequent

communication of this updated visualization with the need to provide sufficient time and freedom of maneuver to subordinate leaders. Commanders' descriptions of their visualizations should account for interdependencies among various domains and the desired end states within those domains.

DIRECT

8-33. Commanders direct action to achieve results and lead forces to mission accomplishment. Decision making and timely sharing of information ensures friendly forces reach a position of advantage relative to the enemy. Commanders who are able to sense, understand, decide, act, and assess faster and more effectively than enemy commanders can impose multiple dilemmas, requiring enemy forces to dedicate resources and combat power which otherwise might further their objectives. Creating and maintaining this state of decision dominance depends on the actions of the commander, informed by a knowledgeable and integrated staff. Communications systems and other technologies can help enable decision dominance, but leaders must take care to ensure they do not become overly reliant on technical solutions that may not always be available.

LEAD

8-34. Leadership is the most decisive element of combat power. Effective leadership can compensate for deficiencies, while poor leadership can negate advantages. Commanders lead by personal example, the quality of the guidance they provide throughout the operations process, and the actions they take during the execution of operations. They focus on the decisions only they can make. Operations encompassing the employment of capabilities from multiple domains demand rapid adjustments based on brief windows of opportunity. Tactical patience is required to develop the conditions that create those opportunities over time. When making or changing decisions, the commander's will and personal presence provides the moral impetus for necessary action in a timely manner. Friction is inherent in all military operations, and leadership exerted by commanders and their subordinate leaders is what overcomes it.

ASSESS

8-35. Commanders, supported by their staffs, assess the situation before execution and throughout operations to understand conditions and determine what decisions they must or are likely to make. They compare the state of current operations to what was anticipated or planned, remain alert to variance from expectations, and watch for information indicating an emerging threat or opportunity. Continuous assessment helps commanders anticipate and adapt their forces to changing circumstances, enabling friendly forces to counter unexpected threats or exploit opportunities. Effective commanders encourage cross talk and dialogue between superior, subordinate, and adjacent staffs, and they conduct dialogue between commanders to share observations and maintain situational understanding. They continuously review assumptions and cumulative risk. Commanders must not be overly fixated on what is happening or may happen on the ground in the physical dimension. Not assessing the relevant events occurring in other domains, or not considering the information or human dimensions, increases the odds that enemy forces can achieve surprise.

ADAPTING FORMATIONS FOR MISSIONS AND TRANSITIONS

8-36. The conduct of successful operations requires leaders and units that are able to anticipate changes and quickly adapt their formations, dispositions, or activities to meet those changes. Anticipating and adapting to changes begins with commanders, but all leaders help create agile and adaptive units, develop subordinates, inspire resilience in their people, and maintain mission focus in the face of adversity.

8-37. Changing conditions and transitions may impact the teamwork and cohesion of a formation; both require adaptation and leader attention. Some examples include—

- Task organization changes.
- New or changing guidance.
- Periods of intense privation and fatigue.
- Mission transitions.
- Mission failures or setbacks.
- Reconstitution.