DISTRIBUTION A:
Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

Who's in Charge?

Service Administrative Control

BRIG GEN JOHN L. BARRY, USAF

THE QUESTION OF WHO is in charge has always plagued military operations. In 1942 Gen George C. Kenney was in Townsville, Australia, where he found himself in a unit that was "another scrambled outfit of Australians and Americans, with so many lines of responsibility, control, and coordination on the organizational chart that it resembled a can of worms as you looked at it."[1] Today's military operations are often no exception. General Kenney solved his problem by ordering Gen Kenneth Walker to "take charge, tear up that chart, and have no one issue orders around there except himself. After he got things operating simply, quickly, and efficiently he could draw a new chart if he wanted to."[2] The concept of having one person in charge with clear lines of authority has resurfaced once again with the advent of the *Presentation of USAF Forces Primer,* also known as the *Little Red Book*. This document delineates the command relationships for our air and space expeditionary forces and puts one person in charge of all Air Force forces. This concept is not new, but in order for it to work, everyone involved needs to have a clear-cut understanding of service command relationships—that is, administrative control (ADCON).

Command authority has once again become a serious subject of discussion among commanders in the Air Force, especially now in light of the multiple contingency taskings our Air Force has responded to in the post-cold-war decade and the growing awareness of doctrine. Commanders, especially wing commanders, have repeatedly performed exceptionally well in military operations other than war (MOOTW) or what we are now calling small-scale contingencies (SSC). However, if one were to ask every wing commander in the Air Force what kind of command authority he or she has and where it comes from, those commanders would probably offer a wide variety of answers.

As a former wing commander, I know that confusion exists about what kind of command authority is exercised at the wing level. The correct answer to the question is that a wing commander exercises ADCON over the people he or she commands, and this authority comes from the service chain of com-

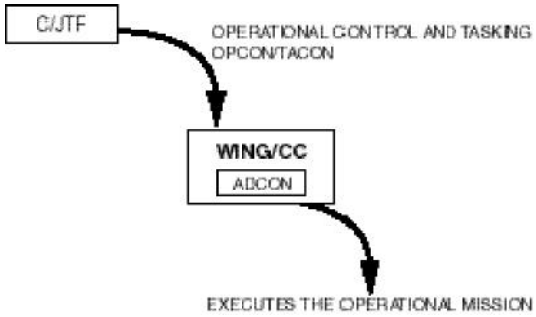

Figure 2. Wing Commanders Are Still War Fighters

that is able to make policy decisions and better allocate scarce resources.

The confusion really starts when one switches from branch to branch in this OPCON/ADCON chain, something that occurs daily. If I'm a wing commander and my wing is flying in a contingency operation (or working a joint exercise), I'm operating under the operational branch of the chain of command. If, however, I'm just flying local training sorties, budgeting for next year, working personnel actions, or maintaining good order and discipline, then I'm operating under the administrative branch. Armed with a basic knowledge of these two branches, I should know whom I work for in any given situation and who is responsible for helping me solve any problems.

To help clarify command relationships, the chief of staff approved the previously mentioned *Presentation of USAF Forces Primer*, which was a year in the making. The premise was that a CINC or a C/JTF commander should have to make only one phone call if he or she had a question about aerospace power. This single voice is the COMAFFOR, who exercises ADCON over all USAF forces assigned or attached to the C/JTF. An added benefit of this concept is that airmen will not be left scratching their heads wondering who is in charge—and neither will our sister services or allies.

Figure 3 shows how a typical air and space expeditionary task force (ASETF) is formed. The *Presentation of USAF Forces Primer* and, more recently, Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, state that NAF commanders are the senior war-fighting echelon for command. This means that whenever a joint force operation is contemplated, COMAFFOR duties will normally be assigned to the NAF commander who is responsible for the area of interest for the joint force. The

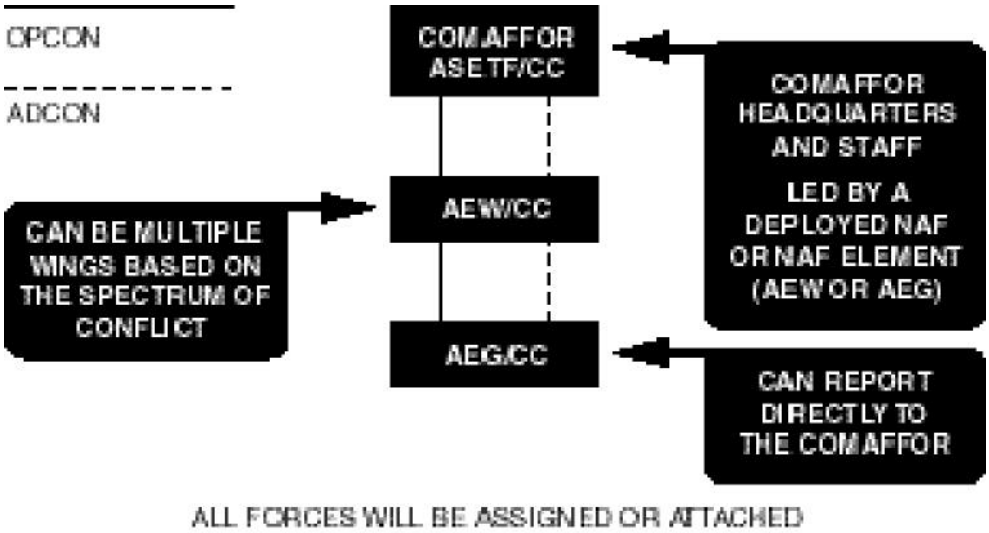

Figure 3. Air and Space Expeditionary Task Force

NAF commander can either command the air forces or delegate COMAFFOR responsibilities to a lower level (air expeditionary wing [AEW] or group [AEG]), depending on the size and scope of the operation.[3] The COMAFFOR may have multiple wings or groups attached to his or her operation. By attaching ("chopping") all involved air forces to the joint operation, we almost eliminate questions/confusion about who has ADCON of these forces.

The ADCON picture becomes more complicated when units deploy to a contingency. Let's say that I'm the commander of a stateside (Air Combat Command) F-16 wing. What happens to my authority when I receive a Joint Chiefs of Staff deployment order to send 12 of my F-16s to Aviano, Italy, to support Operation Joint Guard? I've outlined the command lines in figure 4. This summer, USAFE created the 16th ASETF, consisting of the 31st AEW and the 16th AEW. The commander of the 16th ASETF is the Sixteenth Air Force commander, who is also designated the COMAFFOR for all Air Force forces assigned and attached to Operation Joint Guard. Administratively, all Air Force personnel are attached to the 16th ASETF commander, who further delegated ADCON down to the commanders of the 31st AEW and the 16th AEW. At this point, deployed F-16s are under the OPCON of the joint task force commander and under the TACON of the CFACC. Normally, the CFACC needs only TACON of the forces in order to operate effectively. Also, since the CFACC may not be an Air Force—or even a US—officer, he or she will normally only be delegated TACON of US Air Force forces.

As with any new doctrinal concept, the difference between the theory we draw on the chalkboard and what happens when the rubber meets the ramp can be substantial.

Figure 4 actually becomes more complicated since Operation Joint Guard is a NATO-led combined task force. Therefore, the OPCON of our forces starts with the commander in chief of European Command (CINCEUR) and is then transferred to the supreme allied commander, Europe (SACEUR), then to the commander in chief of Southern Command (CINCSOUTH), and then to the commander

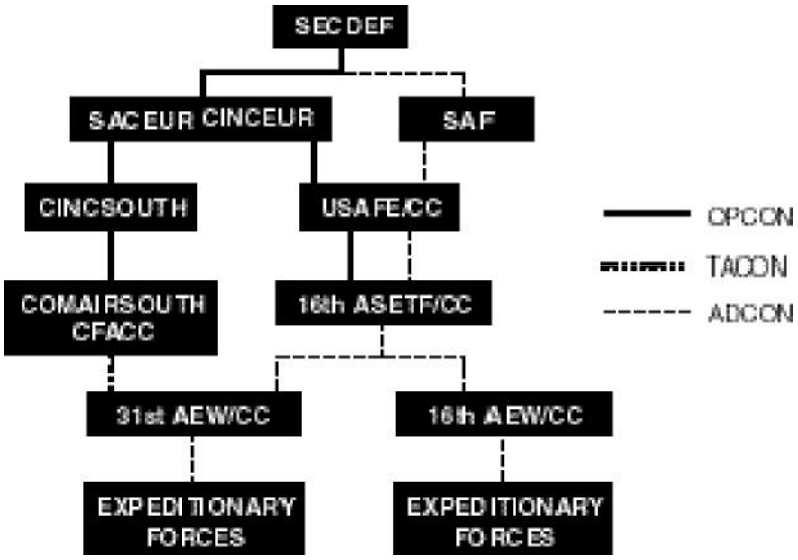

Figure 4. Operation Joint Guard

of Allied Air Forces, Southern Europe (COMAIRSOUTH) as the operational command line transfers to the NATO channels.

Administratively, my personnel now trace their service ADCON chain from the commander of my deployed expeditionary fighter squadron, through the expeditionary wing commander, through the 16th ASETF commander, to the USAFE commander. Note that Air Combat Command is not in the service ADCON chain for the contingency operation—and neither am I as the home-based wing commander![4] When my forces are attached, it means that *some* authority for service ADCON transfers with them.

We must strive to use the expeditionary-force concept every time we participate in a joint or combined exercise and in contingency operations worldwide.

As with any new doctrinal concept, the difference between the theory we draw on the chalkboard and what happens when the rubber meets the ramp can be substantial. Although we really want to clarify who's in charge and give our expeditionary commanders all the authority they need to accomplish the mission, there are clearly some responsibilities in the definition of ADCON that our expeditionary commanders don't need—or want. For example, one of the responsibilities of ADCON entails programming future resources through the Program Objectives Memorandum (POM) cycle, working personnel assignments, writing evaluation reports, awarding decorations, and so forth.[5] Combat contingency commanders clearly do not need to be concerned with these things—they have enough on their plate just being responsible for executing the operational mission. Therefore, we need to develop and standardize the degree of ADCON (call it "specified" ADCON) that we want the expeditionary commander to exercise. We need to clearly spell out this type of control in the deployment order or the G-series order that activates the expeditionary unit. This way, there will be no surprises—our people will know whom they work for, and the expeditionary commander will know exactly what his or her responsibilities are.

With our total force, we must also address some statutory problems. For active duty units, ADCON transfers when the forces are attached to a C/JTF. But the Air Reserve Component (ARC) is a little different. Although the expeditionary commander exercises local UCMJ authority concurrently with the ARC, regardless of active duty affiliation, only under a full mobilization does the ARC transfer ADCON to a joint task force. This issue of exercising ADCON over deploying ARC forces is presently being worked, and guidance will appear in AFDD 2, *Organization and Employment of Aerospace Power*.[6]

The next step is to educate our people. We must emphasize these concepts in professional military education and in leadership schools; further, we should reinforce them by operating the same way when we deploy. We must strive to use the expeditionary-force concept every time we participate in a joint or combined exercise and in contingency operations worldwide. As an air force, we also must agree on how much ADCON authority we want expeditionary commanders to have and what they need to successfully meet the demands of the mission. Finally, we must work to define and standardize how the Guard and Reserve members of our total force will interface so we can apply the same rules across the board, creating a seamless fighting air and space force.

The next time you pack your bags and deploy, whether individually or with part of your unit or your entire unit, you will go expeditionary! Through diligence and adherence to the principles of command authority set forth in our Air Force doctrine, there should never again be a question of "who's in charge?" ADCON to the COMAFFOR—the *airman* in charge. *Remember, we are all one voice speaking for airpower and space power!* □

Notes

1. George C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports: A Personal History of the Pacific War* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1987), 41.

2. Ibid.

3. For example, the COMAFFOR (and the COMAIRSOUTH/CFACC/commander, 16th ASETF) in Bosnia for Operation Joint Guard is the commander of Sixteenth Air Force (O-9), while the COMAFFOR for Operation Northern Watch in Turkey is the commander of the 39th Wing (O-6). In view of the size and scope of the operation, an NAF commander may decide only to establish an AEG that reports directly to the COMAFFOR and not to an AEW (see fig. 3).

4. Even though the parent wing commander is not in the contingency ADCON chain, he or she will still perform those ADCON functions that deal with budgeting, assignments, OPRs/EPRs, and other personnel actions. Expeditionary commanders may elect to process awards and decorations.

5. See note 4.

6. At the Combat Air Force commanders' conference in November 1997, the ARC did agree to the concept of specified ADCON to the COMAFFOR for its deploying forces and will use the Air Expeditionary Force Presentation Concept. Current Air Force instructions (AFI) are being readdressed to further clarify and allow a seamless transfer. These concepts have been further codified in AFDD 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, and AFDD 2, *Organization and Employment of Aerospace Power*. AFDD 1 is the Air Force strategic-level doctrine, and AFDD 2 is operational-level doctrine.

Prejudice against innovation is a typical characteristic of an Officer Corps which has grown up in a well-tried and proven system.

—Field Marshal Erwin Rommel