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## Chapter 3

# Preparing for War

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*“The essential thing is action. Action has three stages: the decision born of thought, the order or preparation for execution, and the execution itself. All three stages are governed by the will. The will is rooted in character, and for the man of action character is of more critical importance than intellect. Intellect without will is worthless, will without intellect is dangerous.”*<sup>1</sup>

—Hans von Seeckt

*“It is not enough that the troops be skilled infantry men or artillery men of high morale: they must be skilled water men and jungle men who know it can be done—Marines with Marine training.”*<sup>2</sup>

—Earl H. Ellis



**D**uring times of peace, the most important task of any military is to prepare for war. Through its preparedness, a military provides deterrence against potential aggressors. As the nation's expeditionary force-in-readiness, the Marine Corps must maintain itself for immediate employment in "any clime and place" and in any type of conflict. All peacetime activities should focus on achieving combat readiness. This implies a high level of training, flexibility in organization and equipment, professional leadership, and a cohesive doctrine.

## **FORCE PLANNING**

*Force planning* is planning that is associated with the creation and maintenance of military capabilities.<sup>3</sup> Planning plays as important a role in the preparation for war as it does in the conduct of war. The key to any plan is a clearly defined objective, in this case a required level of readiness.

The Marine Corps' force planning is concept-based. That is, all force planning derives from a common set of concepts which describe how Marine Corps forces will operate and perform certain key functions. These concepts describe the types of missions Marine forces are likely to be required to perform and how they might accomplish those missions. These concepts

provide the basis for identifying required capabilities and implementing coordinated programs to develop those capabilities.

Based on this common set of concepts, force planning integrates all the efforts of the peacetime Marine Corps, including training, education, doctrine, organization, personnel management, and equipment acquisition. Unity of effort is as important during the preparation for war as it is during the conduct of war. This systematic process of identifying the objective and planning a course to obtain it applies to all areas and levels of preparations.

## **ORGANIZATION**

The operating forces must be organized to provide forward deployed or rapidly deployable forces capable of conducting expeditionary operations in any environment. This means that in addition to maintaining their unique amphibious capability, the operating forces must maintain the capability to deploy by whatever means is appropriate to the situation.

The active operating forces must be capable of responding immediately to most types of crisis and conflict. Many sustained missions will require augmentation from the Reserve establishment.

For operations and training, Marine forces will be formed into Marine air-ground task forces (MAGTFs). MAGTFs are task organizations consisting of ground, aviation, combat service support, and command elements. They have no standard structure, but rather are constituted as appropriate for the specific situation. The MAGTF provides a single commander a combined arms force that can be tailored to the situation faced. As the situation changes, it may of course be necessary to restructure the MAGTF.

Operating forces should be organized for warfighting and then adapted for peacetime rather than vice versa. Tables of organization should reflect the two central requirements of *deployability* and the *ability to task-organize according to specific situations*. Units should be organized according to type only to the extent dictated by training, administrative, and logistic requirements.

Commanders should establish habitual relationships between supported and supporting units to develop operational familiarity among those units. This does not preclude nonstandard relationships when required by the situation.

## DOCTRINE

Doctrine is a teaching of the fundamental beliefs of the Marine Corps on the subject of war, from its nature and theory to its

preparation and conduct.<sup>4</sup> Doctrine establishes a particular way of thinking about war and a way of fighting. It also provides a philosophy for leading Marines in combat, a mandate for professionalism, and a common language. In short, it establishes the way we practice our profession. In this manner, doctrine provides the basis for harmonious actions and mutual understanding.

Marine Corps doctrine is made official by the Commandant and is established in this publication. Our doctrine does not consist of procedures to be applied in specific situations so much as it sets forth general guidance that requires judgment in application. Therefore, while authoritative, doctrine is not prescriptive.

## PROFESSIONALISM

Marine Corps doctrine demands professional competence among its leaders. *As military professionals charged with the defense of the Nation, Marine leaders must be true experts in the conduct of war.* They must be individuals both of action and of intellect, skilled at “getting things done” while at the same time conversant in the military art. Resolute and self-reliant in their decisions, they must also be energetic and insistent in execution.<sup>5</sup>

The military profession is a thinking profession. Every Marine is expected to be a student of the art and science of war. Officers especially are expected to have a solid foundation in military theory and a knowledge of military history and the timeless lessons to be gained from it.

Leaders must have a strong sense of the great responsibility of their office; the resources they will expend in war are human lives.

The Marine Corps' style of warfare requires intelligent leaders with a penchant for boldness and initiative down to the lowest levels. Boldness is an essential moral trait in a leader for it generates combat power beyond the physical means at hand. Initiative, the willingness to act on one's own judgment, is a prerequisite for boldness. These traits carried to excess can lead to rashness, but we must realize that errors by junior leaders stemming from overboldness are a necessary part of learning.<sup>6</sup> We should deal with such errors leniently; there must be no "zero defects" mentality. Abolishing "zero defects" means that we do not stifle boldness or initiative through the threat of punishment. It does not mean that commanders do not counsel subordinates on mistakes; constructive criticism is an important element in learning. Nor does it give subordinates free license to act stupidly or recklessly.

Not only must we not stifle boldness or initiative, but we must continue to encourage both traits *in spite of mistakes*. On the other hand, we should deal severely with errors of inaction

or timidity. We will not accept lack of orders as justification for inaction; it is each Marine's *duty* to take initiative as the situation demands. We must not tolerate the avoidance of responsibility or necessary risk.

Consequently, trust is an essential trait among leaders—trust by seniors in the abilities of their subordinates and by juniors in the competence and support of their seniors. Trust must be earned, and actions which undermine trust must meet with strict censure. Trust is a product of confidence and familiarity. Confidence among comrades results from demonstrated professional skill. Familiarity results from shared experience and a common professional philosophy.

Relations among all leaders—from corporal to general—should be based on honesty and frankness regardless of disparity between grades. Until a commander has reached and stated a decision, subordinates should consider it their duty to provide honest, professional opinions even though these may be in disagreement with the senior's opinions. However, once the decision has been reached, juniors then must support it as if it were their own. Seniors must encourage candor among subordinates and must not hide behind their grade insignia. Ready compliance for the purpose of personal advancement—the behavior of “yes-men”—will not be tolerated.

## **TRAINING**

The purpose of all training is to develop forces that can win in combat. Training is the key to combat effectiveness and therefore is the main effort of a peacetime military. However, training should not stop with the commencement of war; training must continue during war to adapt to the lessons of combat.

All officers and enlisted Marines undergo similar entry-level training which is, in effect, a socialization process. This training provides all Marines a common experience, a proud heritage, a set of values, and a common bond of comradeship. It is the essential first step in the making of a Marine.

Basic individual skills are an essential foundation for combat effectiveness and must receive heavy emphasis. All Marines, regardless of occupational specialty, will be trained in basic combat skills. At the same time, unit skills are extremely important. They are not simply an accumulation of individual skills; adequacy in individual skills does not automatically mean unit skills are satisfactory.

Commanders at each echelon must allot subordinates sufficient time and freedom to conduct the training necessary to achieve proficiency at their levels. They must ensure that

higher-level demands do not deny subordinates adequate opportunities for autonomous unit training.

In order to develop initiative among junior leaders, the conduct of training—like combat—should be decentralized. Senior commanders influence training by establishing goals and standards, communicating the intent of training, and establishing a main effort for training. As a rule, they should refrain from dictating how the training will be accomplished.

Training programs should reflect practical, challenging, and progressive goals beginning with individual and small-unit skills and culminating in a fully combined arms MAGTF. In general, the organization for combat should also be the organization for training. That is, units, including MAGTFs, should train with the full complement of assigned, reinforcing, and supporting forces they require in combat.

Collective training consists of drills and exercises. Drills are a form of small-unit training which stress proficiency by progressive repetition of tasks. Drills are an effective method for developing standardized techniques and procedures that must be performed repeatedly without variation to ensure speed and coordination. Examples are gun drills, preflight preparations, or immediate actions. In contrast, exercises are designed to train units and individuals in tactics under simulated combat conditions. Exercises should approximate the conditions of war as much as possible; that is, they should introduce friction in the form of uncertainty, stress, disorder, and opposing wills.

This last characteristic is most important; only in opposed, free-play exercises can we practice the art of war. Dictated or “canned” scenarios eliminate the element of independent, opposing wills that is the essence of war.

Critiques are an important part of training because critical self-analysis, even after success, is essential to improvement. Their purpose is to draw out the lessons of training. As a result, we should conduct critiques immediately after completing training, before memory of the events has faded. Critiques should be held in an atmosphere of open and frank dialogue in which all hands are encouraged to contribute. We learn as much from mistakes as from things done well, so we must be willing to admit mistakes and discuss them. Of course, a subordinate’s willingness to admit mistakes depends on the commander’s willingness to tolerate them. Because we recognize that no two situations in war are the same, our critiques should focus not so much on the actions we took as on why we took those actions and why they brought the results they did.

## **PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION**

Professional military education is designed to develop creative, thinking leaders. From the initial stages of leadership training, a leader’s career should be viewed as a continuous, progressive

process of development. At each stage, a Marine should be preparing for the subsequent stage.

The early stages of a leader's career are, in effect, an apprenticeship. While receiving a foundation in theory and concepts that will serve them throughout their careers, leaders focus on understanding the requirements and learning and applying the procedures and techniques associated with a particular field. This is when they learn their trades as aviators, infantrymen, artillerymen, or logisticians. As they progress, leaders should strive to master their respective fields and to understand the interrelationship of the techniques and procedures within the field. A Marine's goal at this stage is to become an expert in the tactical level of war.

As an officer continues to develop, mastery should encompass a broader range of subjects and should extend to the operational level of war. At this stage, an officer should not only be an expert in tactics and techniques but should also understand combined arms, amphibious warfare, and expeditionary operations. At the senior levels, an officer should be fully capable of articulating, applying, and integrating MAGTF warfighting capabilities in a joint and multinational environment and should be an expert in the art of war at all levels.

The responsibility for implementing professional military education in the Marine Corps is three-tiered: It resides not only with the education establishment, but also with the commander and the individual.

The education establishment consists of those schools—administered by the Marine Corps, subordinate commands, or outside agencies—established to provide formal education in the art and science of war. All professional schools, particularly officer schools, should focus on developing a talent for military judgment, not on imparting knowledge through rote learning. Study conducted by the education establishment can neither provide complete career preparation for an individual nor reach all individuals. Rather, it builds upon the base provided by commanders and by individual study.

All commanders should consider the professional development of their subordinates a principal responsibility of command. Commanders should foster a personal teacher-student relationship with their subordinates. Commanders are expected to conduct a continuing professional education program for their subordinates that includes developing military judgment and decisionmaking and teaches general professional subjects and specific technical subjects pertinent to occupational specialties. Useful tools for general professional development include supervised reading programs, map exercises, war games, battle studies, and terrain studies. *Commanders should see the development of their subordinates as a direct reflection on themselves.*

Finally, every Marine has an individual responsibility to study the profession of arms. A leader without either interest in or knowledge of the history and theory of warfare—the intel-

lectual content of the military profession—is a leader in appearance only. Self-directed study in the art and science of war is at least equal in importance to maintaining physical condition and should receive at least equal time. This is particularly true among officers; after all, the mind is an officer’s principal weapon.

## **PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT**

Since war is at base a human enterprise, effective personnel management is important to success. This is especially true for a doctrine of maneuver warfare, which places a premium on individual judgment and action. We should recognize that all Marines of a given grade and occupational specialty are not interchangeable and should assign people to billets based on specific ability and temperament. This includes recognizing those who are best suited to command assignments and those who are best suited to staff assignments—without penalizing one or the other by so recognizing.

The personnel management system should seek to achieve personnel stability within units and staffs as a means of fostering cohesion, teamwork, and implicit understanding. We recognize that casualties in war will take a toll on personnel stability, but the greater stability a unit has initially, the better it will absorb those casualties and incorporate replacements.

Finally, promotion and advancement policy should reward the willingness to accept responsibility and exercise initiative.

## **EQUIPPING**

Equipment should be easy to operate and maintain, reliable, and interoperable with other equipment. It should require minimal specialized operator training. Further, equipment should be designed so that its use is consistent with established doctrine and tactics. A primary consideration is strategic and tactical lift—the Marine Corps’ reliance on shipping for strategic mobility and on landing craft, helicopters, and vertical/short take-off and landing aircraft for tactical mobility from ship to shore and during operations ashore. Another key consideration is employability and supportability in undeveloped theaters with limited supporting infrastructure—where Marine Corps units can frequently expect to operate.

In order to minimize research and development costs and fielding time, the Marine Corps will exploit existing capabilities—“off-the-shelf” technology—to the greatest extent possible.

Acquisition should be a complementary, two-way process based on established operating and functional concepts. Especially for the long term, the process must identify combat requirements and develop equipment to satisfy these require-

ments. Where possible, we should base these requirements on an analysis of likely enemy vulnerabilities and should develop equipment to exploit those vulnerabilities. At the same time, the process should not overlook existing equipment of obvious usefulness.

Equipment is useful only if it increases combat effectiveness. Any piece of equipment requires support: operator training, maintenance, power sources or fuel, and transport. The anticipated enhancement of capabilities must justify these support requirements and the employment of the equipment must take these requirements into account.

The acquisition effort should balance the need for specialization with the need for utility in a broad range of environments. Increasing the capabilities of equipment generally requires developing increasingly specialized equipment. Increasingly specialized equipment tends to be increasingly vulnerable to countermeasures. One solution to this problem is not to develop a single family of equipment, but to maintain variety in equipment types.

As much as possible, employment techniques and procedures should be developed concurrently with equipment to minimize delays between the fielding of the equipment and its usefulness to the operating forces. For the same reason, initial operator training should also precede equipment fielding.

There are two dangers with respect to equipment: the overreliance on technology and the failure to make the most of technological capabilities. Technology can enhance the ways and means of war by improving humanity's ability to wage it, but technology cannot and should not attempt to eliminate humanity from the process of waging war. Better equipment is not the cure for all ills; doctrinal and tactical solutions to combat deficiencies must also be sought. Any advantages gained by technological advancement are only temporary for someone will always find a countermeasure, tactical or itself technological, which will lessen the impact of the technology. Additionally, we must not become so dependent on equipment that we can no longer function effectively when the equipment becomes inoperable. Finally, we must exercise discipline in the use of technology. Advanced information technology especially can tempt us to try to maintain precise, positive control over subordinates, which is incompatible with the Marine Corps philosophy of command.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are two basic military functions: waging war and preparing for war. Any military activities that do not contribute to the conduct of a present war are justifiable only if they contribute to preparedness for a possible future one. Clearly, we cannot afford to separate conduct and preparation. They must be inti-

mately related because failure in preparation leads to disaster on the battlefield.

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## Chapter 4

# The Conduct of War

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*“Now an army may be likened to water, for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so an army avoids strength and strikes weakness.”<sup>1</sup>*

—Sun Tzu

*“Speed is the essence of war. Take advantage of the enemy’s unpreparedness; travel by unexpected routes and strike him where he has taken no precautions.”<sup>2</sup>*

—Sun Tzu

*“Many years ago, as a cadet hoping some day to be an officer, I was poring over the ‘Principles of War,’ listed in the old Field Service Regulations, when the Sergeant-Major came up to me. He surveyed me with kindly amusement. ‘Don’t bother your head about all them things, me lad,’ he said. ‘There’s only one principle of war and that’s this. Hit the other fellow, as quick as you can, and as hard as you can, where it hurts him most, when he ain’t lookin’!’”<sup>3</sup>*

—Sir William Slim



**T**he sole justification for the United States Marine Corps is to secure or protect national policy objectives by military force when peaceful means alone cannot. How the Marine Corps proposes to accomplish this mission is the product of our understanding of the nature and the theory of war and must be the guiding force behind our preparation for war.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

The challenge is to develop a concept of warfighting consistent with our understanding of the nature and theory of war and the realities of the modern battlefield. What exactly does this require? It requires a concept of warfighting that will help us function effectively in an uncertain, chaotic, and fluid environment—in fact, one with which we can exploit these conditions to our advantage. It requires a concept with which we can sense and use the time-competitive rhythm of war to generate and exploit superior tempo. It requires a concept that is consistently effective across the full spectrum of conflict because we cannot attempt to change our basic doctrine from situation to situation and expect to be proficient. It requires a concept with which we can recognize and exploit the fleeting opportunities that naturally occur in war. It requires a concept that takes into account the moral and mental as well as the physical forces of war because we have already concluded that these form the greater part of war. It requires a concept with which we can succeed against a numerically superior foe because we cannot

presume a numerical advantage either locally or overall. Especially in expeditionary situations in which public support for military action may be tepid and short-lived, it requires a concept with which we can win quickly against a larger foe on his home soil with minimal casualties and limited external support.

## MANEUVER WARFARE

The Marine Corps concept for winning under these conditions is a warfighting doctrine based on rapid, flexible, and opportunistic maneuver. In order to fully appreciate what we mean by *maneuver*, we need to clarify the term. The traditional understanding of maneuver is a spatial one; that is, we maneuver in space to gain a positional advantage.<sup>4</sup> However, in order to maximize the usefulness of maneuver, we must consider maneuver in other dimensions as well. The essence of maneuver is taking action to generate and exploit some kind of advantage over the enemy as a means of accomplishing our objectives as effectively as possible. That advantage may be psychological, technological, or temporal as well as spatial. Especially important is maneuver *in time*—we generate a faster operating tempo than the enemy to gain a temporal advantage. It is through maneuver in all dimensions that an inferior force can achieve decisive superiority at the necessary time and place.

*Maneuver warfare is a warfighting philosophy that seeks to shatter the enemy's cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope.*

Rather than wearing down an enemy's defenses, maneuver warfare attempts to bypass these defenses in order to *penetrate* the enemy system and tear it apart. The aim is to render the enemy incapable of resisting effectively by shattering his moral, mental, and physical cohesion—his ability to fight as an effective, coordinated whole—rather than to destroy him physically through the incremental attrition of each of his components, which is generally more costly and time-consuming. Ideally, the components of his physical strength that remain are irrelevant because we have disrupted his ability to use them effectively. Even if an outmaneuvered enemy continues to fight as individuals or small units, we can destroy the remnants with relative ease because we have eliminated his ability to fight effectively as a force.

This is not to imply that firepower is unimportant. On the contrary, firepower is central to maneuver warfare. Nor do we mean to imply that we will pass up the opportunity to physically destroy the enemy. We will concentrate fires and forces at decisive points to destroy enemy elements when the opportunity presents itself and when it fits our larger purposes. Engaged in combat, we can rarely go wrong if we aggressively

pursue the destruction of enemy forces. In fact, maneuver warfare often involves extremely high attrition of selected enemy forces where we have focused combat power against critical enemy weakness. Nonetheless, the aim of such attrition is not merely to reduce incrementally the enemy's physical strength. Rather, it is to contribute to the enemy's systemic disruption. The greatest effect of firepower is generally not physical destruction—the cumulative effects of which are felt only slowly—but the disruption it causes.

If the aim of maneuver warfare is to shatter the cohesion of the enemy system, the immediate object toward that end is to create a situation in which the enemy cannot function. By our actions, we seek to pose menacing dilemmas in which events happen unexpectedly and more quickly than the enemy can keep up with them. The enemy must be made to see the situation not only as deteriorating, but deteriorating at an ever-increasing rate. The ultimate goal is panic and paralysis, an enemy who has lost the ability to resist.

Inherent in maneuver warfare is the need for *speed* to seize the initiative, dictate the terms of action, and keep the enemy off balance, thereby increasing his friction. We seek to establish a pace that the enemy cannot maintain so that with each action his reactions are increasingly late—until eventually he is overcome by events.

Also inherent is the need to *focus* our efforts in order to maximize effect. In combat this includes violence and shock effect, again not so much as a source of physical attrition, but as

a source of disruption. We concentrate strength against critical enemy vulnerabilities, striking quickly and boldly where, when, and in ways in which it will cause the greatest damage to our enemy's ability to fight. Once gained or found, any advantage must be pressed relentlessly and unhesitatingly. We must be ruthlessly opportunistic, actively seeking out signs of weakness against which we will direct all available combat power. When the *decisive* opportunity arrives, we must exploit it fully and aggressively, committing every ounce of combat power we can muster and pushing ourselves to the limits of exhaustion.

An important weapon in our arsenal is *surprise*, the combat value of which we have already recognized. By studying our enemy, we will attempt to appreciate his perceptions. Through deception we will try to shape the enemy's expectations. Then we will exploit those expectations by striking at an unexpected time and place. In order to appear unpredictable, we must avoid set rules and patterns, which inhibit imagination and initiative. In order to appear ambiguous and threatening, we should operate on axes that offer numerous courses of action, keeping the enemy unclear as to which we will choose.

Besides traits such as endurance and courage that all warfare demands, maneuver warfare puts a premium on certain particular human skills and traits. It requires the temperament to cope with uncertainty. It requires flexibility of mind to deal with fluid and disorderly situations. It requires a certain independence of mind, a willingness to act with initiative and boldness, an exploitive mindset that takes full advantage of every

opportunity, and the moral courage to accept responsibility for this type of behavior. It is important that this last set of traits be guided by self-discipline and loyalty to the objectives of seniors. Finally, maneuver warfare requires the ability to think above our own level and to act at our level in a way that is in consonance with the requirements of the larger situation.

## **ORIENTING ON THE ENEMY**

Orienting on the enemy is fundamental to maneuver warfare. Maneuver warfare attacks the enemy “system.” The enemy system is whatever constitutes the entity confronting us within our particular sphere. For a pilot, it might be the combination of air defense radars, surface-to-air missiles, and enemy aircraft that must be penetrated to reach the target. For a rifle company commander, it might be the mutually supporting defensive positions, protected by obstacles and supported by crew-served weapons, on the next terrain feature. For an electronic warfare specialist, it might be the enemy’s command and control networks. For a Marine expeditionary force commander, it might be all the major combat formations within an area of operations as well as their supporting command and control, logistics, and intelligence organizations.

We should try to understand the unique characteristics that make the enemy system function so that we can penetrate the

system, tear it apart, and, if necessary, destroy the isolated components. We should seek to identify and attack critical vulnerabilities and those centers of gravity without which the enemy cannot function effectively. This means focusing outward on the particular characteristics of the enemy rather than inward on the mechanical execution of predetermined procedures.

If the enemy system, for example, is a fortified defensive works, penetrating the system may mean an infiltration or a violent attack on a narrow frontage at a weak spot to physically rupture the defense, after which we can envelop the enemy positions or roll them up laterally from within. In this way we defeat the logic of the system rather than frontally overwhelming each position.

We should try to “get inside” the enemy’s thought processes and see the enemy as he sees himself so that we can set him up for defeat. It is essential that we understand the enemy on his own terms. We should not assume that every enemy thinks as we do, fights as we do, or has the same values or objectives.

## **PHILOSOPHY OF COMMAND**

It is essential that our philosophy of command support the way we fight. First and foremost, *in order to generate the tempo of operations we desire and to best cope with the uncertainty, disorder, and fluidity of combat, command and control must*

*be decentralized.* That is, subordinate commanders must make decisions on their own initiative, based on their understanding of their senior's intent, rather than passing information up the chain of command and waiting for the decision to be passed down. Further, a competent subordinate commander who is at the point of decision will naturally better appreciate the true situation than a senior commander some distance removed. Individual initiative and responsibility are of paramount importance. The principal means by which we implement decentralized command and control is through the use of mission tactics, which we will discuss in detail later.

Second, since we have concluded that war is a human enterprise and no amount of technology can reduce the human dimension, our philosophy of command must be based on human characteristics rather than on equipment or procedures. Communications equipment and command and staff procedures can enhance our ability to command, but they must not be used to lessen the human element of command. Our philosophy must not only accommodate but must exploit human traits such as boldness, initiative, personality, strength of will, and imagination.

Our philosophy of command must also exploit the human ability to communicate *implicitly*.<sup>5</sup> We believe that *implicit communication*—to communicate through *mutual understanding*, using a minimum of key, well-understood phrases or even *anticipating* each other's thoughts—is a faster, more effective way to communicate than through the use of detailed, explicit instructions. We develop this ability through familiar-

ity and trust, which are based on a shared philosophy and shared experience.

This concept has several practical implications. First, we should establish long-term working relationships to develop the necessary familiarity and trust. Second, key people—“actuals”—should talk directly to one another when possible, rather than through communicators or messengers. Third, we should communicate orally when possible, because we communicate also in *how* we talk—our inflections and tone of voice. Fourth, we should communicate in person when possible because we communicate also through our gestures and bearing.

Commanders should command from where they can best influence the action, normally well forward. This allows them to see and sense firsthand the ebb and flow of combat, to gain an intuitive appreciation for the situation that they cannot obtain from reports. It allows them to exert personal influence at decisive points during the action. It also allows them to locate themselves closer to the events that will influence the situation so that they can observe them directly and circumvent the delays and inaccuracies that result from passing information up and down the chain of command. Finally, we recognize the importance of personal leadership. Only by their physical presence—by demonstrating the willingness to share danger and privation—can commanders fully gain the trust and confidence of subordinates. *We must remember that command from the front should not equate to oversupervision of subordinates.* At the same time, it is important to balance the need for forward

command with the need for keeping apprised of the overall situation, which is often best done from a central location such as a combat operation center. Commanders cannot become so focused on one aspect of the situation that they lose overall situational awareness.

As part of our philosophy of command, we must recognize that war is inherently disorderly, uncertain, dynamic, and dominated by friction. Moreover, maneuver warfare, with its emphasis on speed and initiative, is by nature a particularly disorderly style of war. The conditions ripe for exploitation are normally also very disorderly. For commanders to try to gain certainty as a basis for actions, maintain positive control of events at all times, or dictate events to fit their plans is to deny the nature of war. We must therefore be prepared to cope—even better, to *thrive*—in an environment of chaos, uncertainty, constant change, and friction. If we can come to terms with those conditions and thereby limit their debilitating effects, we can use them as a weapon against a foe who does not cope as well.

In practical terms, this means that we must not strive for certainty before we act, for in so doing we will surrender the initiative and pass up opportunities. We must not try to maintain excessive control over subordinates since this will necessarily slow our tempo and inhibit initiative. We must not attempt to impose precise order on the events of combat since this leads to a formularistic approach to war. We must be prepared to adapt to changing circumstances and exploit opportu-

nities as they arise, rather than adhering insistently to predetermined plans that have outlived their usefulness.

There are several points worth remembering about our command philosophy. First, while it is based on our warfighting style, this does not mean it applies only during war. We must put it into practice during the preparation for war as well. We cannot rightly expect our subordinates to exercise boldness and initiative in the field when they are accustomed to being over-supervised in garrison. Whether the mission is training, procuring equipment, administration, or police call, this philosophy should apply.

Next, our philosophy requires competent leadership at all levels. A centralized system theoretically needs only one competent person, the senior commander, who is the sole authority. A decentralized system requires leaders at all levels to demonstrate sound and timely judgment. Initiative becomes an essential condition of competence among commanders.

Our philosophy also requires familiarity among comrades because only through a shared understanding can we develop the implicit communication necessary for unity of effort. Perhaps most important, our philosophy demands confidence among seniors and subordinates.

## SHAPING THE ACTION

Since our goal is not merely the cumulative attrition of enemy strength, we must have some larger scheme for how we expect to achieve victory. That is, before anything else, we must conceive how we intend to win.

The first requirement is to establish what we want to accomplish, why, and how. Without a clearly identified concept and intent, the necessary unity of effort is inconceivable. We must identify those *critical* enemy vulnerabilities that we believe will lead most directly to undermining the enemy's centers of gravity and the accomplishment of our mission. Having done this, we can then begin to act so as to shape the campaign, operation, battle, or engagement to our advantage in both time and space. Similarly, we must try to see ourselves through our enemy's eyes in order to identify our own vulnerabilities that he may attack and to anticipate what he will try to do so that we can counteract him. Ideally, when the moment of engagement arrives, the issue will have already been resolved: Through our influencing of the events leading up to the encounter, we have so shaped the conditions of war that the result is a matter of course. We have shaped the action decisively to our advantage.

To influence the action to our advantage, we must project our thoughts forward in time and space. We frequently do this through planning. This does not mean that we establish a de-

tailed timetable of events. We have already concluded that war is inherently disorderly, and we cannot expect to dictate its terms with any sort of precision. Rather, we attempt to shape the general conditions of war. This shaping consists of lethal and nonlethal actions that span the spectrum from direct attack to psychological operations, from electronic warfare to the stockpiling of critical supplies for future operations. Shaping activities may render the enemy vulnerable to attack, facilitate maneuver of friendly forces, and dictate the time and place for decisive battle. Examples include canalizing enemy movement in a desired direction, blocking or delaying enemy reinforcements so that we can fight a fragmented enemy force, or shaping enemy expectations through deception so that we can exploit those expectations. We can attack a specific enemy capability to allow us to maximize a capability of our own such as launching an operation to destroy the enemy's air defenses so that we can maximize the use of our own aviation.

Through shaping, commanders gain the initiative, preserve momentum, and control the tempo of operations. We should also try to shape events in a way that allows us several options so that by the time the moment for decisive operations arrives, we have not restricted ourselves to only one course of action.

The further ahead we think, the less our actual influence can be. Therefore, the further ahead we consider, the less precision we should attempt to impose. Looking ahead thus becomes less a matter of direct influence and more a matter of laying the groundwork for possible future actions. As events approach

and our ability to influence them grows, we have already developed an appreciation for the situation and how we want to shape it.<sup>6</sup>

The higher our echelon of command, the greater is our sphere of influence and the further ahead in time and space we must seek to shape the action. Senior commanders developing and pursuing military strategy look ahead weeks, months, or more, and their areas of influence and interest will encompass entire theaters. Junior commanders fighting the battles and engagements at hand are concerned with the coming hours, even minutes, and the immediate field of battle. Regardless of the sphere in which we operate, it is essential to have some vision of the result we want and how we intend to shape the action in time and space to achieve it.

## **DECISIONMAKING**

Decisionmaking is essential to the conduct of war since all actions are the result of decisions or of nondecisions. If we fail to make a decision out of lack of will, we have willingly surrendered the initiative to our foe. If we consciously postpone taking action for some reason, that is a decision. Thus, as a basis for action, any decision is generally better than no decision.

Since war is a conflict between opposing wills, we cannot make decisions in a vacuum. We must make our decisions in

light of the enemy's anticipated reactions and counteractions, recognizing that while we are trying to impose our will on the enemy, he is trying to do the same to us.

Time is a critical factor in effective decisionmaking—often the most important factor. A key part of effective decisionmaking is realizing how much decision time is available and making the most of that time. In general, whoever can make and implement decisions consistently faster gains a tremendous, often decisive advantage. Decisionmaking in execution thus becomes a time-competitive process, and timeliness of decisions becomes essential to generating tempo. Timely decisions demand rapid thinking with consideration limited to essential factors. In such situations, we should spare no effort to accelerate our decisionmaking ability. That said, we should also recognize those situations in which time is not a limiting factor—such as deliberate planning situations—and should not rush our decisions unnecessarily.

A military decision is not merely a mathematical computation. Decisionmaking requires both the situational awareness to recognize the essence of a given problem and the creative ability to devise a practical solution. These abilities are the products of experience, education, and intelligence.

Decisionmaking may be an intuitive process based on experience. This will likely be the case at lower levels and in fluid, uncertain situations. Alternatively, decisionmaking may be a more analytical process based on comparing several options.

This will more likely be the case at higher levels or in deliberate planning situations.

We should base our decisions on *awareness* rather than on mechanical *habit*. That is, we act on a keen appreciation for the essential factors that make each situation unique instead of from conditioned response. We must have the moral courage to make tough decisions in the face of uncertainty—and to accept full responsibility for those decisions—when the natural inclination would be to postpone the decision pending more complete information. To delay action in an emergency because of incomplete information shows a lack of moral courage. We do not want to make rash decisions, but we must not squander opportunities while trying to gain more information.

Finally, since all decisions must be made in the face of uncertainty and since every situation is unique, there is no perfect solution to any battlefield problem. Therefore, we should not agonize over one. The essence of the problem is to select a promising course of action with an acceptable degree of risk and to do it more quickly than our foe. In this respect, “a good plan violently executed *now* is better than a perfect plan executed next week.”<sup>7</sup>

## MISSION TACTICS

One key way we put maneuver warfare into practice is through the use of *mission tactics*. Mission tactics is just as the name implies: the tactics of assigning a subordinate mission without specifying how the mission must be accomplished.<sup>8</sup> We leave the manner of accomplishing the mission to the subordinate, thereby allowing the freedom—and establishing the duty—for the subordinate to take whatever steps deemed necessary based on the situation. Mission tactics relies on a subordinate's exercise of initiative framed by proper guidance and understanding.

Mission tactics benefits the senior commander by freeing time to focus on higher-level concerns rather than the details of subordinate execution. The senior prescribes the method of execution only to the degree that is essential for coordination. The senior intervenes in a subordinate's execution only by exception. It is this freedom for initiative that permits the high tempo of operations that we desire. Uninhibited by excessive restrictions from above, subordinates can adapt their actions to the changing situation. They inform the commander of what they have done, but they do not wait for permission.

Mission tactics serves as a contract between senior and subordinate. The senior agrees to provide subordinates with the support necessary to help them accomplish their missions but without unnecessarily prescribing their actions. The senior is obligated to provide the guidance that allows subordinates to

exercise proper judgment and initiative. The subordinate is obligated to act in conformity with the intent of the senior. The subordinate agrees to act responsibly and loyally and not to exceed the proper limits of authority. Mission tactics requires subordinates to act with “top-sight”—a grasp of how their actions fit into the larger situation.<sup>9</sup> In other words, subordinates must always think above their own levels in order to contribute to the accomplishment of the higher mission.

It is obvious that we cannot allow decentralized initiative without some means of providing unity, or focus, to the various efforts. To do so would be to dissipate our strength. We seek unity not principally through imposed control, but through *harmonious* initiative and lateral coordination within the context provided by guidance from above.

## COMMANDER’S INTENT

We achieve this harmonious initiative in large part through the use of the commander’s *intent*, a device designed to help subordinates understand the larger context of their actions. The purpose of providing intent is to allow subordinates to exercise judgment and initiative—to depart from the original plan when the unforeseen occurs—in a way that is consistent with higher commanders’ aims.

There are two parts to any *mission*: the task to be accomplished and the reason or intent behind it.<sup>10</sup> The intent is thus a

part of every mission. The task describes the action to be taken while the intent describes the *purpose* of the action. The task denotes *what* is to be done, and sometimes *when* and *where*; the intent explains *why*. Of the two, the intent is predominant. While a situation may change, making the task obsolete, the intent is more lasting and continues to guide our actions. Understanding the intent of our commander allows us to exercise initiative in harmony with the commander's desires.

The intent for a unit is established by the commander assigning that unit's mission—usually the next higher commander, although not always. A commander normally provides intent as part of the mission statement assigned to a subordinate. A subordinate commander who is not given a clear purpose for the assigned mission should ask for one. Based on the mission, the commander then develops a concept of operations, which explains *how* the unit will accomplish the mission, and assigns missions to subordinates. Each subordinate mission statement includes an intent for that subordinate. The intent provided to each subordinate should contribute to the accomplishment of the intent a commander has received from above. This top-down flow of intent provides consistency and continuity to our actions and establishes the context that is essential for the proper bottom-up exercise of initiative.

It is often possible to capture intent in a simple “. . . in order to . . .” phrase following the assigned task. To maintain our focus on the enemy, we can often express intent in terms of the enemy. For example: “Control the bridge in order to prevent

the enemy from escaping across the river.” Sometimes it may be necessary to provide amplifying guidance in addition to an “. . . in order to . . .” statement. In any event, a commander’s statement of intent should be brief and compelling—the more concise, the better. A subordinate should be ever conscious of a senior’s intent so that it guides every decision. An intent that is involved or complicated will fail to accomplish this purpose.

A clear expression and understanding of intent is essential to unity of effort. The burden of understanding falls on senior and subordinate alike. The seniors must make their purposes perfectly clear but in a way that does not inhibit initiative. Subordinates must have a clear understanding of what their commander expects. Further, they should understand the intent of the commander at least two levels up.

## MAIN EFFORT

Another important tool for providing unity is the *main effort*. Of all the actions going on within our command, we recognize one as the most critical to success at that moment. The *unit* assigned responsibility for accomplishing this key mission is designated as the main effort—the focal point upon which converges the combat power of the force. The main effort receives priority for support of any kind. It becomes clear to all other units in the command that they must support that unit in

the accomplishment of its mission. Like the commander's intent, the main effort becomes a harmonizing force for subordinate initiative. Faced with a decision, we ask ourselves: *How can I best support the main effort?*

We cannot take lightly the decision of which unit we designate as the main effort. In effect, we have decided: *This is how I will achieve a decision; everything else is secondary.* We carefully design the operation so that success by the main effort ensures the success of the entire mission. Since the main effort represents our primary bid for victory, we must direct it at that object which will have the most significant effect on the enemy and which holds the best opportunity of success. The main effort involves a physical and moral commitment, although not an irretrievable one. It forces us to concentrate decisive combat power just as it forces us to accept risk. Thus, we direct our main effort against a center of gravity through a critical enemy vulnerability, exercising strict economy elsewhere.

Each commander should establish a main effort for each operation. As the situation changes, the commander may shift the main effort, redirecting the weight of combat power in support of the unit that is now most critical to success. In general, when shifting the main effort, we seek to exploit success rather than reinforce failure.

## **SURFACES AND GAPS**

Put simply, surfaces are hard spots—enemy strengths—and gaps are soft spots—enemy weaknesses. We avoid enemy strength and focus our efforts against enemy weakness with the object of penetrating the enemy system since pitting strength against weakness reduces casualties and is more likely to yield decisive results. Whenever possible, we exploit existing gaps. Failing that, we create gaps.

Gaps may in fact be physical gaps in the enemy's dispositions, but they may also be any weakness in time, space, or capability: a moment in time when the enemy is overexposed and vulnerable, a seam in an air defense umbrella, an infantry unit caught unprepared in open terrain, or a boundary between two units.

Similarly, a surface may be an actual strongpoint, or it may be any enemy strength: a moment when the enemy has just replenished and consolidated a position or a technological superiority of a particular weapons system or capability.

An appreciation for surfaces and gaps requires a certain amount of judgment. What is a surface in one case may be a gap in another. For example, a forest which is a surface to an armored unit because it restricts vehicle movement can be a gap to an infantry unit which can infiltrate through it. Further-

more, we can expect the enemy to disguise his dispositions in order to lure us against a surface that appears to be a gap.

Due to the fluid nature of war, gaps will rarely be permanent and will usually be fleeting. To exploit them demands flexibility and speed. We must actively seek out gaps by continuous and aggressive reconnaissance. Once we locate them, we must exploit them by funneling our forces through rapidly. For example, if our main effort has struck a surface but another unit has located a gap, we designate the second unit as the main effort and redirect our combat power in support of it. In this manner, we “pull” combat power through gaps from the front rather than “pushing” it through from the rear.<sup>11</sup> Commanders must rely on the initiative of subordinates to locate gaps and must have the flexibility to respond quickly to opportunities rather than blindly follow predetermined schemes.

## **COMBINED ARMS**

In order to maximize combat power, we must use all the available resources to best advantage. To do so, we must follow a doctrine of combined arms. Combined arms is the full integration of arms in such a way that to counteract one, the enemy must become more vulnerable to another. We pose the enemy not just with a problem, but with a dilemma—a no-win situation.

We accomplish combined arms through the tactics and techniques we use at the lower levels and through task organization at higher levels. In so doing, we take advantage of the complementary characteristics of different types of units and enhance our mobility and firepower. We use each arm for missions that no other arm can perform as well; for example, we assign aviation a task that cannot be performed equally well by artillery. An example of the concept of combined arms at the very lowest level is the complementary use of the automatic weapon and grenade launcher within a fire team. We pin an enemy down with the high-volume, direct fire of the automatic weapon, making him a vulnerable target for the grenade launcher. If he moves to escape the impact of the grenades, we engage him with the automatic weapon.

We can expand the example to the MAGTF level: We use assault support aircraft to quickly concentrate superior ground forces for a breakthrough. We use artillery and close air support to support the infantry penetration, and we use deep air support to interdict enemy reinforcements that move to contain the penetration. Targets which cannot be effectively suppressed by artillery are engaged by close air support. In order to defend against the infantry attack, the enemy must make himself vulnerable to the supporting arms. If he seeks cover from the supporting arms, our infantry can maneuver against him. In order to block our penetration, the enemy must reinforce quickly with his reserve. However, in order to avoid our deep air support, he must stay off the roads, which means he can only move slowly.

If he moves slowly, he cannot reinforce in time to prevent our breakthrough. We have put him in a dilemma.

## **CONCLUSION**

We have discussed the aim and characteristics of maneuver warfare. We have discussed the philosophy of command necessary to support this style of warfare. We have discussed some of the tactics of maneuver warfare. By this time, it should be clear that maneuver warfare exists not so much in the specific methods used—we do not believe in a formularistic approach to war—but in the mind of the Marine. In this regard, maneuver warfare, like combined arms, applies equally to the Marine expeditionary force commander and the fire team leader. It applies regardless of the nature of the conflict, whether amphibious operations or sustained operations ashore, of low or high intensity, against guerrilla or mechanized foe, in desert or jungle.

Maneuver warfare is a way of thinking in and about war that should shape our every action. It is a state of mind born of a bold will, intellect, initiative, and ruthless opportunism. It is a state of mind bent on shattering the enemy morally and physically by paralyzing and confounding him, by avoiding his strength, by quickly and aggressively exploiting his vulnerabilities, and by striking him in the way that will hurt him most. In

short, maneuver warfare is a philosophy for generating the greatest decisive effect against the enemy at the least possible cost to ourselves—a philosophy for “fighting smart.”