

Maneuver Warfare Handbook

William S. Lind

Westview Special Studies
in Military Affairs



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Westview Special Studies

The concept of Westview Special Studies is a response to the continuing crisis in academic and informational publishing. Library budgets are being diverted from the purchase of books and used for data banks, computers, micromedia, and other methods of information retrieval. Interlibrary loan structures further reduce the edition sizes required to satisfy the needs of the scholarly community. Economic pressures on university presses and the few private scholarly publishing companies have greatly limited the capacity of the industry to properly serve the academic and research communities. As a result, many manuscripts dealing with important subjects, often representing the highest level of scholarship, are no longer economically viable publishing projects--or, if accepted for publication, are typically subject to lead times ranging from one to three years.

Westview Special Studies are our practical solution to the problem. As always, the selection criteria include the importance of the subject, the work's contribution to scholarship, and its insight, originality of thought, and excellence of exposition. We accept manuscripts in camera-ready form, typed, set, or word processed according to specifications laid out in our comprehensive manual, which contains straightforward instructions and sample pages. The responsibility for editing and proofreading lies with the author or sponsoring institution, but our editorial staff is always available to answer questions and provide guidance.

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About the Book and Author

Maneuver warfare, often controversial and requiring operational and tactical innovation, poses perhaps the most important doctrinal questions currently facing the conventional military forces of the United States. The purpose of maneuver warfare is to defeat the enemy by disrupting his ability to react, rather than by physical destruction of forces. This book develops and explains the theory of maneuver warfare and offers specific tactical, operational, and organizational recommendations for improving ground combat forces. The author translates concepts--too often vaguely stated discussions of maneuver warfare--into concrete doctrine. Although the book uses the Marine Corps as a model, the concepts, tactics, and doctrine discussed apply to any ground combat force.

William S. Lind is an advisor on military affairs to U.S. Senator Gary Hart, president of the Military Reform Institute, and a Resident Scholar at the Institute for Government and Politics of the Free Congress Foundation.

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For any errors in the book, as well as for any passages at which some may take offense (as some invariably will), I take full and sole responsibility.

William S. Lin

Foreword

Colonel John C. Studt, USMC (Ret.)

The author of this book has never served a day of active military duty, and he has never been shot at, although there are no doubt some senior officers who would like to remedy that latter deficiency. Yet he demonstrates an amazing understanding of the art of war, as have only a small handful of military thinkers I have come across in my career.

I served over 31 years active duty with the Marine Corps, saw combat in both Korea and Vietnam and attended service schools from The Basic School to the National War College. Yet only toward the end of my military career did I realize how little I really understood the art of war. Even as a Pfc in Korea, after being med-evaced along with most of my platoon after a fruitless frontal assault against superior North Korean forces, it seemed to me there had to be a better way to wage war. Seventeen years later, commanding a battalion at Khe Sanh, I was resolved that none of my Marines would die for lack of superior combat power. But we were still relying on the concentration of superior firepower to win--essentially still practicing Grant's attrition warfare. And we were still doing frontal assaults!

When I first heard Bill Lind speak, I must confess I resented a mere civilian expressing criticism of the way our beloved Corps did things. After all, he was not one of us, he had not shed blood with us in battle, he was not a brother. And I had strong suspicions that he would have difficulty passing the PFI. But what he said made sense! For the first time I was personally hearing someone advocate an approach to war that was based on intellectual innovation rather than sheer material superiority, mission-type orders, surfaces and gaps, and Schwerpunkt, instead of the rigid formulas and checklists that we normally associate with our training and doctrine. It was a stimulating experience! Through Lind's articulation, years of my own reading of military history began to make a lot more sense.

But why all this from a civilian instead of a professional soldier? In fact, the entire movement for military reform is driven largely by civilian intellectuals, not military officers--one notable exception being retired Air Force Colonel John Boyd. When you think about it, this is not surprising. We have never institutionalized a system that encourages innovative ideas or criticism from subordinates. Proposing significant change is frequently viewed as criticism of superiors, since they are responsible for the way things are, and borders on disloyalty if not insubordination. So it is not surprising that the movement for reform comes from outside the military establishment.

And it is not surprising that the author of this book should be in the forefront of the reform movement and president of the Military Reform Institute. A magna cum laude history major from Dartmouth, Bill Lind was gifted with a brilliant mind and a rare talent for translating the lessons of history into practical application. He has studied and researched war, and has delved into the minds of the more successful practitioners, as no professional military officer I know of has done. His crusade to sell "maneuver warfare" has made him well known--if not well loved--by those who read the Marine Corps Gazette and other current military literature.

In this handbook Bill Lind lays out the concept of maneuver warfare in clear, understandable

language, and he supports and illustrates his theories with excellent historical examples. What he has produced is a text book on how to conduct warfare, and it calls for a totally different approach than what we teach in our schools today. Yet it is no more than a compilation of theories proven on a hundred battlefields throughout history. But it would seem that only the Germans and Israelis have institutionalized the practice of maneuver warfare in recent times.

B. H. Liddell Hart once remarked that “The only thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind is to get an old one out.” In 1925, when he was expounding such heretical theories as the “indirect approach,” the American General Service Schools’ “Review of Current Military Literature” dismissed one of Liddell Hart’s major works as: “Of negative value to the instructors of these schools.” I expect Marine Corps schools to receive this publication with similar enthusiasm. But I cannot believe a professional military officer would not benefit by reading it. For the first time in our history we face a potential enemy with superiority in men and material. Against such an enemy we cannot win with the firepower/attrition doctrine we embrace today. In this book Bill Lind offers a different alternative.

Introduction

Although this book has been written to be helpful to anyone interested in land warfare, it is addressed primarily to Marines. Most Marines have already heard or read something about maneuver warfare. It has been the subject of many articles in the Marine Corps Gazette. The 2nd Marine Division, under Major General A. M. Gray, Jr., adopted maneuver warfare as doctrine. General Gray established a Maneuver Warfare Board to help spread the concept throughout the division, and also carried out a series of maneuver warfare field exercises at Ft. Pickett, Virginia. The Junior Officers Tactical Symposium in the 1st Marine Division has also worked to understand and develop maneuver warfare ideas. For a brief period, maneuver tactics were taught as doctrine at Amphibious Warfare School.

Nor is maneuver warfare just of academic interest to Marines. 2nd Battalion 8th Marines, under Lt Col. Ray Smith, used it on Grenada. As this author wrote in a Military Reform Institute report:

Although the Marine units on Grenada never met much opposition, they did face a number of confusing and urgent situations, which they seem to have handled well. Reflecting their parent 2nd Marine Division's emphasis on maneuver warfare, they did not attempt to follow a rigid plan but rather adapted swiftly to circumstances as they changed. The speed with which the Marines acted and moved was decisive in one interesting case. The Grenadians had about one platoon of troops defending St. George's, which ultimately did not fight. Part of the reason it did not was explained by a senior Grenadian officer after his capture. He said the Marines appeared so swiftly where they were not expected that the Grenadian Army's high command in the capital was convinced resistance was hopeless, the best possible outcome in maneuver warfare. ¹

Despite all the attention, maneuver warfare remains a subject of much confusion. Some say, "It's just a fancy new name for what we've always done." Others call it "common sense tactics," as if all it requires is a bit of common sense. Terms such as mission-type orders, reconnaissance pull, surface and gaps, and Schwerpunkt are thrown around with little understanding of their meaning or significance.

The purpose of this handbook is to try to clear up the confusion. It has been written as a ready reference for field Marines, not an academic monograph. It seeks to define and explain the basic concepts and terminology of maneuver warfare; to show some practical ways to apply maneuver warfare theory; and to spur further thinking, reading, and writing on the subject by Marines.

Why should Marines care about maneuver warfare? Why should anyone bother to write a book on the subject especially for Marines? Maneuver warfare has special meaning and potential for the Marine Corps, for three reasons:

First, the Marine Corps has traditionally been an innovator. In the 1920s and 1930s, when the common wisdom said amphibious warfare was impossible under modern conditions, Marines responded with some uncommon wisdom. They studied history with great care, thought about what they had read, and gave their imaginations free rein. They developed new amphibious concepts, doctrine and techniques. With strong support from their Commandants, they took their new ideas to the field and tested them.

When war came in 1941, the new ideas were ready, and they worked. As General Alexander A

Vandegrift said, “Despite its outstanding record as a combat force in the past war, the Marine Corps’ far greater contribution to victory was doctrinal: that is, the fact that the basic amphibious doctrine which carried Allied troops over every beachhead of World War II had been largely shaped -- often in the face of uninterested or doubting military orthodoxy -- by U.S. Marines, and mainly between 1920 and 1935.”²

Second, Marines know they are likely to fight outnumbered. In Europe, the Warsaw Pact fielded more combat units than NATO. In the Persian Gulf, nations such as Iran and Iraq have armies of 500,000 or more men. In other parts of the Middle East, in Asia, and even in Latin America, because of a shortage of amphibious lift, the relatively small size of the Corps and the many commitments facing the Army mean that Marines could be sent into battle against a numerically superior enemy.

History suggests God is on the side of the bigger battalions -- unless the smaller battalions have a better idea. A slugging match against someone much stronger than yourself is never very promising. Even if you win, the cost is usually high. But if you can use judo against your larger opponent, if you can psych him out, throw him off balance, and use his own momentum against him, you can win, and often you can win quickly and at small cost.

Maneuver warfare can be thought of as military judo. It is a way of fighting smart, of out-thinking an opponent you may not be able to overpower with brute strength. As such, it offers Marines the best hope of winning the battles, campaigns and wars they may face in the future.

Third, to a Marine, nothing is more important than combat. In some other services, the most important things sometimes seem to be engineering or management or high technology. Marines have not fallen into these traps. They do not introduce themselves at cocktail parties as “middle managers.” They see themselves as fighters, as warriors, and they want to be the best of the breed. They are willing to work, study and, if necessary, “bet their bars” in order to be the best.

That is what this book is about -- combat, and how to win in combat. That is what maneuver warfare is about. And that is why this book has been written for Marines.

The Theory of Maneuver Warfare

Maneuver warfare is not new. It probably dates from the first time a caveman surprised an enemy from behind instead of meeting him club-to-club. The first clear case in recorded history was the battle of Leuctra in 371 B.C. The Thebans won that battle, thanks to a surprise strike against the right flank of the rigid Spartan phalanx. Hannibal's defeat of the Romans at Cannae in 216 B.C., one of the most decisive tactical victories of all time, was an example of maneuver warfare. Modern history offers many examples: Rosecranz at Chattanooga, Grant at Vicksburg, and Jackson's Valley Campaign in the American Civil War; German infiltration tactics in the offensive of 1918; the World War II Blitzkrieg; and General Sharon's attack across the Suez Canal in 1973.

Why are all these cases of "maneuver warfare"? What is "maneuver"? Sometimes the word maneuver is used as a synonym for movement, such as in references to "fire and maneuver" in small unit tactics. A traditional definition is offered by Soviet Colonel F. D. Sverdlov in a recent study, Tactical Maneuver. "Maneuver...is organized movement of troops (forces) during combat operations to a new axis (line) and region for the purpose of taking an advantageous position relative to the enemy in order to deliver a decisive strike."¹

But when used in the phrase "maneuver warfare," maneuver means much more. It is what all the cases--Leuctra, Cannae, Vicksburg, the German 1918 offensive, the Suez Canal crossing and many others--have in common. The theory of maneuver warfare must answer the question: What was the essence of success in all of these cases?

Only recently has someone suggested a convincing answer. The man is a retired Air Force colonel and fighter pilot named John Boyd. Colonel Boyd's development of the theory of maneuver warfare began, not with ground battles, but with a study of some mock air-to-air combat exercises (conducted at Nellis Air Force Base in 1974) that led him back to the study of air-to-air combat during the Korean war. American aviators were very successful in that conflict. They achieved a 10:1 kill ratio over the North Korean and Chinese opponents. Colonel Boyd began his study with the question: "How and why did we do so well?"

He noted that in several traditional measures of aircraft performance, the principal Communist fighter, the MiG-15, was superior to the American F-86. It could climb and accelerate faster, and had a better sustained turn rate. But in two less obvious measures of aircraft performance, the F-86 was much superior to the MiG. First, the pilot could see out much better. The F-86's bubble canopy gave its pilot very good outward vision, while the MiG's faired canopy made it difficult to see out. Second, the F-86 had high-powered and highly effective hydraulic controls and the MiG did not. This meant that while the MiG could do many individual actions--including turn, climb, and accelerate--better than the F-86, the F-86 could transition from one action to another much more quickly than the MiG.

Using these two superiorities, the American pilots developed a tactical approach that forced the MiG into a series of actions. Each time the action changed, the F-86 gained a time advantage, because

the F-86 pilot could see more quickly how the situation had changed and he could also make his aircraft shift more quickly to a new action. With each change, the MiG's actions became more inappropriate, until they were so inappropriate that the MiG gave the F-86 a good firing opportunity. Often, it appeared the MiG pilot realized what was happening to him and panicked, which made the American pilot's job all the easier.

Later Colonel Boyd began studying ground combat to see if there were situations similar to that he had found in the air war over Korea. He found that in battles, campaigns and wars like Leuctra, Vicksburg and France in 1940, a similar thing seemed to have happened. One side had presented the other with a sudden, unexpected change or a series of such changes to which it could not adjust in a timely manner. As a result, it was defeated, and it was generally defeated at small cost to the victor. Often, the losing side had been physically stronger than the winner. And often, the same sort of panic and paralysis the North Korean and Chinese pilots had shown seemed to occur.

Colonel Boyd asked himself, what did all these cases have in common? His answer was what is now called the Boyd Theory, which is the theory of maneuver warfare. The briefing Colonel Boyd gives to explain his theory, "Patterns of Conflict," takes over five hours. But, at the cost of missing some of the subtleties and the supporting historical evidence in the briefing, it can be summarized as follows.

Conflict can be seen as time-competitive observation-orientation-decision-action cycles. Each party to a conflict begins by observing. He observes himself, his physical surroundings and his enemy. On the basis of his observation, he orients, that is to say, he makes a mental image or "snapshot" of his situation. On the basis of this orientation, he makes a decision. He puts the decision into effect, i.e., he acts. Then, because he assumes his action has changed the situation, he observes again, and starts the process anew. His actions follow this cycle, sometimes called the "Boyd Cycle" or "OODA Loop."

If one side in a conflict can consistently go through the Boyd Cycle faster than the other, it gains a tremendous advantage. By the time the slower side acts, the faster side is doing something different from what he observed, and his action is inappropriate. With each cycle, the slower party's action becomes more inappropriate by a larger time margin. Even though he desperately strives to do something that will work, each action is less useful than its predecessor; he falls farther and farther behind. Ultimately, he ceases to be effective.

This is what happened to the Spartans at Leuctra, the Romans at Cannae, the French in 1940 and the Communist fighter pilots over Korea. Sometimes, a single action was enough, as in the Theban oblique attack at Leuctra. Sometimes, as in the Blitzkrieg or air combat over Korea, a series of OODA Loops was required. But whether it was through a single action or a large number, the essence of what happened was the same.

The Boyd Theory defines what is meant by the word "maneuver" in the term "maneuver warfare." Maneuver means Boyd Cycling the enemy, being consistently faster through however many OODA Loops it takes until the enemy loses his cohesion-- until he can no longer fight as an effective, organized force.

Sometimes, a Boyd Cycled enemy panics or becomes passive. This is an ideal outcome for the victor, because a panicked or passive enemy can be annihilated or captured at the lowest cost in friendly casualties. At other times, the outmaneuvered enemy may continue to fight as individuals or small units. But because he can no longer act effectively as a force, he is comparatively easy to destroy. A good example of a panicked enemy can be seen in Rommel's success at the battle of Caporetto in World War I, where with a force of about a battalion he took more than 10,000 Italian prisoners. At Cannae, the Romans continued to fight as individuals. But in both situations, the basis of victory was the same: one side Boyd Cycled the other.

If the object in maneuver warfare is to move through OODA Loops faster than the enemy, what do you need to do? How can you be consistently faster? Much of the rest of this book is an effort to address that question. But in terms of general theory, the following points are worth thinking about:

1. Only a decentralized military can have a fast OODA Loop. If the observations must be passed up the chain of command, the orientation made and the decision taken at a high level, and the command for action then transmitted back down the chain, the OODA Loop is going to be slow. As the Israeli military historian Martin Van Creveld has observed:

From Plato to NATO, the history of command in war consists of an endless quest for certainty. Certainty concerning the state and intentions of the enemy's forces; certainty concerning the manifold factors which together constitute the environment, from the weather and the terrain to radioactivity and the presence of chemical warfare agents; and, last but definitely not least, certainty concerning the state and activities of one's own forces... historical commanders have always faced the choice between two basic ways of coping with uncertainty. One was to construct an army of automatons following the orders of a single man, allowed to do only that which could be controlled; the other, to design organizations and operations in such a way as to enable the former to carry out the latter without the need for continuous control. ...the second of these methods has, by and large, proved more successful than the first; and...the ongoing revolution in the technology of command notwithstanding, this is likely to remain so in the future and indeed so long as war itself exists.²

2. Maneuver warfare means you will not only accept confusion and disorder and operate successfully within it, through decentralization, you will also generate confusion and disorder. The “reconnaissance pull” (see Chapters II and III) tactics of the German Blitzkrieg were inherently disorderly. Higher headquarters could neither direct nor predict the exact path of the advance. But the multitude of German reconnaissance thrusts generated massive confusion among the French in 1940. Each was reported as a new attack. The Germans seemed to be everywhere, and the French, whose system demanded certainty before making any decisions, were paralyzed.

3. All patterns, recipes and formulas are to be avoided. The enemy must not be able to predict your actions. If your tactics follow predictable patterns, the enemy can easily cut inside your OODA Loop. If he can predict what you will do, he will be waiting for you.

This is why it is so hard to tell someone how to do maneuver warfare. There is no formula you can learn. When someone says, “Cut all the bull about theory; just tell me what to do,” you can't. You can talk about how to think, and about some useful techniques. But you can't give new formulas to replace the ones currently taught at Marine Corps schools.

Instead of a checklist or a cookbook, maneuver warfare requires commanders who can sense more than they can see, who understand the opponent's strengths and weaknesses and their own, and who can find the enemy's critical weaknesses in a specific situation (which is seldom easy). They must be able to create multiple threats and keep the enemy uncertain as to which is real. They must be able to see their options in the situation before them, constantly create new options, and shift rapidly among options as the situation develops. General Hermann Balck, one of the most successful practitioners of maneuver warfare, said:

I'm against the school approach that says, “In accordance with the ideas of the General Staff, in this situation you must do thus and such.” On the contrary, you must proceed as dictated by the personalities involved and the particulars of the situation. For instance, you are attacking at 7 o'clock in the morning and you have given clear tasks to each of your divisions: this one takes this objective

the next one grabs this, the third does nothing except to protect the left flank. At the next attack opportunity you may have an almost identical situation, but everything must be changed completely because your most competent division commander has been killed in the meanwhile.

Therefore, one of the first principles has to be: There can be no fixed schemes. Every scheme, even a pattern is wrong. No two situations are identical. That is why the study of military history can be extremely dangerous.

Another principle that follows from this is: Never do the same thing twice. Even if something works well for you once, by the second time the enemy will have adapted. So you have to think up something new.

No one thinks of becoming a great painter simply by imitating Michaelangelo. Similarly, you can't become a great military leader just by imitating so and so. It has to come from within. In the last analysis, military command is an art: one man can do it and most will never learn. After all, the world is not full of Raphaels either.³

Tactics and Operations

If maneuver warfare cannot be done by formulas and recipes, how can it be done? To help answer this question, you might want to look at some pictures of maneuver warfare.

Picture #1: The expanding torrent. B. H. Liddell Hart, the famous British military historian and theorist, drew an analogy between a maneuver warfare attack and flowing water. He wrote:

If we watch a torrent bearing down on each successive bank or earthen dam in its path, we see that the first beats against the obstacle, feeling and testing it at all points.

Eventually, it finds a small crack at some point. Through this crack pour the first dribblets of water and rush straight on.

The pent-up water on each side is drawn towards the breach. It swirls through and around the flanks of the breach, wearing away the earth on each side and so widening the gap.

Simultaneously the water behind pours straight through the breach between the side eddies which are wearing away the flanks. Directly it has passed through it expands to widen once more the onrush of the torrent. Thus as the water pours through in ever-increasing volume the onrush of the torrent swells to its original proportions, leaving in turn each crumbling obstacle behind it.

Thus Nature's forces carry out the ideal attack, automatically maintaining the speed, the breadth and the continuity of the attack.¹

Picture #2: German defensive tactics in 1917. During the winter of 1916-17, the Germans abandoned what we think of as the classic First World War defense, where men were closely packed into trenches and fought to hold every inch of ground. Instead, they adopted an elastic defense in depth, a defense that reflected maneuver warfare. Captain Timothy Lupfer discusses it in his excellent study, [The Dynamics of Doctrine](#):

The trenches were necessary for daily living, but once detected they were lathered with preparatory fire and barrages. Deep dugouts in forward areas were also impractical, for soldiers remained in them too long after the enemy barrage lifted and were often captured. Therefore, under heavy fire, the forward German soldiers evacuated their trenches and shifted from shell hole to shell hole, avoiding concentrations of fire and escaping the detection of aerial artillery spotters.

The Allied advance would first encounter resistance from pockets of German survivors in shell holes. Having been concealed from aerial observation, units positioned on the reverse slope would then open fire unexpectedly. The Allies would also encounter fortified strongpoints... built to provide for all-around defense and they engaged the attackers, whenever possible, with devastating enfilade fire. The strongpoints would remain fighting even if cut off by the enemy advance.

The ideal scenario was:

A fragmented, exhausted Allied attack force reaches the battle zone. They hope that their thorough artillery preparation has killed all the Germans, but they encounter several Germans firing at the

from shell holes in the torn ground. Sudden fire from the German main line of resistance has slowed the Allies and their scheduled artillery barrage has crept forward without them, according to a time sequence of fire they cannot modify. They feel helpless without artillery support. The Allies finally have taken the main line of resistance at great cost, but now they are in unfamiliar ground, under fire from concealed enemy machine gunners and riflemen. German artillery, which the Allies expected to destroy in the preparatory fires, now appears very active. The Germans concentrate their artillery fire behind the Allied advanced units, cutting them off from reinforcements and supplies. For the next few minutes, the Allies have a tenuous hold on a few acres of ground, but by advancing into the battle zone, the Allies are most vulnerable, and have exposed themselves to the counterattack, the soul of the German defense. The immediate counterattack, well coordinated with accurate artillery fire, destroys or captures or ejects the Allied unit before it can consolidate its gains. The coherence of the German defense is restored...

In its most developed form, the defense had designated counterattack forces throughout the zone. In the outpost zone, local commanders designated counterattack squads. In the battle zone, commanders designated counterattack companies... The regiment's reserve battalion was part of the division reserve, in which each remaining battalion from each frontline regiment served as a counterattack battalion, striking from the rear of the battle zone. Behind these counterattack battalions were the reserves of the field army (entire counterattack divisions), and OHL itself (Supreme Army Headquarters) retained control of additional counterattack divisions.

The defense thus assumed a very aggressive and potentially offensive character. The best time for a counterattack was the period of confusion when the attacker had not yet consolidated his position and had not reorganized his forces. Timing was critical.²

Picture #3: German assault tactics on the Eastern Front, 1942. Following an abortive armored attack on a Soviet defensive position, an infantry task force cleared the strongpoint using assault teams and follow-on reinforcements.

The left wing was formed by the seasoned 6th Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, the right by the 1st Armored Infantry Battalion of the 114th Infantry Regiment (Mechanized). The two battalions were reinforced by engineer assault detachments, flame-thrower teams, and mine-clearing details. The tanks and remaining armored infantry elements were assembled in the rear between Zalivsky and Klykov, where they stayed in reserve, ready to follow up the assault force.

At 0800 on 17 December the massed guns of the artillery regiment opened fire. As the hail of shells came down on the ridge it obliterated the Russian observation post. The dried-out steppe grass burned fiercely and reddish clouds of dust enveloped the whole ridge, depriving the Russians of all visibility. After a short time, however, the fires died out because a light snowfall prevented them from spreading.

Meanwhile, the first German assault wave moved up to the ridge. When a signal flare was set off to indicate it was entering the Russian defensive positions, the artillery fire was shifted. The assault detachments had opened a gap at the center of the ridge. The difficult task of ferreting out the enemy force dug in on the ridge had thus begun.

Several squadrons of German dive bombers, flying in relays, came over and headed in the direction of Verkhniy Kumskiy, where they blasted Russian artillery positions, silencing one battery after another. Directly overhead, Messerschmitts and Ratas tangled in dogfights, during which three of the Russian fighters were shot down near the ridge.

Paying little heed to the air action, the assault forces fanned out from the initial point of penetration

and moved forward. Machine gunners and sharpshooting riflemen stalked the hidden Russians like a cat in a game and fired well-aimed bullets at anything that moved. Whenever Russians from a nearby foxhole returned the fire, they were silenced by a well-placed hand grenade. The fortified positions were neutralized by the flame-thrower teams. Whenever a particularly fanatic Russian force could not be flushed out by the assault troops they fired a signal flare to pinpoint the target for the German artillery pieces and mortars.

By noon the reconnaissance battalion had cleared all enemy forces from its zone of action, and an hour later the armored infantry battalion had done likewise on the eastern part of the ridge. An attack on Verkhniy Kumskiy could be envisaged.³

Today, Marines learn tactics as a series of formulas, starting at The Basic School. Tactics are defined as the “how to” of things like a penetration, an attack, coordination of supporting arms and so on. Ability is measured in checklist-type tests like the CAX and the MCCRES. In 1983, the final exam in tactics at Amphibious Warfare School was all true/false or multiple choice, and included such questions as “The _ stove is the primary heat source for the Ten Man Tent,” and “The _ is the basic skiing technique utilized in a controlled movement downhill.”

Maneuver warfare is not very concerned with names of stoves and skiing techniques. It looks at tactics differently. A useful definition of tactics in maneuver warfare is:

Tactics is a process of combining two elements, techniques and education, through three mental “filters” or reference points -mission-type orders, the focus of effort or Schwerpunkt, and the search for enemy surfaces and gaps--with the object of producing a unique approach for the specific enemy at a given time and place.

What does a careful look at this definition show? First, it says tactics is not a thing, but a process, especially a mental process. It is a way of doing something. It is not just a certain type of attack or defense, it is also why you chose that particular attack or defense. Tactics is not just your decision as a commander, it is how you come to your decision--your method.

Second, the definition says the goal of the process is a unique approach. You always want to do something different, something the enemy does not expect.

Third, you must consider the specific enemy, time and place. Everything must be according to the situation. Each situation is different. One enemy behaves differently from another -- Czechs or Norwegians or Koreans or Syrians fight differently from Soviets. One Soviet division or regiment or company will fight differently from another. And the same enemy unit will fight differently on Thursday from the way it fought on Tuesday. What you do as a commander must take all these changes into account. What works one day will not work the next.

Fourth, tactics combines two basic elements, techniques and education. Techniques are things you can do by formula. They include how to aim a rifle, set up a machine gun, give an order, establish communications, call in fire support, gun crew drills, unit battle drills and so on. Excellence in techniques is very important in maneuver warfare! Some people have suggested maneuver warfare advocates do not care about techniques. This is flat wrong! A major difference between a military theorist who can do maneuver warfare in combat and one that can only talk about it is excellence in technique. Sloppy techniques slow down your Boyd Cycle and make your action ineffective.

But good techniques are not enough. The process that is tactics includes the art of selecting from among your techniques those which create that unique approach for the enemy, time and place. Education is the basis for doing that -- education not in what to do, but in how to think. Military history, war gaming, terrain walks and all other educational tools must be used by every officer

build his own military education. It is only the combination of techniques and education that enable an officer to do maneuver tactics. Education without excellence in techniques means action will not be timely or effective. But techniques without education means tactics will be formulistic, rigid, and predictable to the enemy.

What about the three “filters”? Perhaps the first question is, what is a “filter”? A filter is a mental reference point, a way to help shape and guide your thought process. We all have them. Some are conscious, some not. Three are very helpful in maneuver warfare tactics: mission-type orders, Schwerpunkt, and surfaces and gaps.

1. Mission-type orders. Mission-type orders are key to the decentralization necessary for a rapid Boyd Cycle. A mission-type order tells the subordinate commander what his superior wants to have accomplished. That is the mission. It leaves how to accomplish it largely up to the subordinate. As the subordinate’s situation changes, he does what he thinks is necessary to bring about the result his superior wants. He informs his superior what he has done, but he does not wait for permission before he acts. What would happen to his Boyd Cycle if he did?

A useful way to think of mission-type orders is in terms of contracts between superior and subordinate.⁴ There are two contracts. One is long-term. It is based on what we call the commander’s intent. This is the commander’s long-term vision of what he wants to have happen to the enemy, of the final result he wants. The subordinate needs to understand this two levels up. If he is a platoon commander, he needs to know the battalion commander’s intent. If he is a company commander, he needs to know the brigade commander’s intent, and so on. The “contract” is simple: the subordinate contracts to make his actions serve his superior’s intent -- what is to be accomplished -- and the superior contracts to allow the subordinate great freedom of action in terms of how his intent is realized.

The mission is a shorter-term contract. It is a “slice” of the commander’s intent, a slice small enough to be appropriate to the immediate situation of the subordinate unit. The contract is the same: the subordinate agrees to make his actions support the mission in return for wide-ranging freedom in selecting the means.

How far does this freedom of action go? The answer, as is so often the case in maneuver warfare, is that it depends on the situation. In some cases, the freedom of action granted the subordinate may be total. The superior may not specify anything more than the result to be achieved. For example, at one point during the fighting on the Golan Heights during the 1973 Mideast war, an Israeli commander received orders to block a Syrian armored brigade. That was the whole order -- don’t let them through.⁵

At other times, the orders may be quite specific and detailed as far as the subordinate’s initial actions are concerned. A good example is a deliberate attack on a prepared position. Jumping-off points, timing, and initial objectives will often be specified, and the subordinate will rightly be expected to do what he is told. But once the attack is underway and the situation begins changing rapidly, the subordinate will again be expected to adjust his actions to the changes on his own initiative, with appropriate reference to his superior’s intent.

Under such a system, how do you avoid mistakes? You don’t entirely. Mission-type orders and “zero-defects mentality” are contradictory. Several years ago, a member of Congress told a German Army colonel that he wanted to organize his Congressional office on the basis of mission-type orders. The colonel replied, “That is very good, but I hope you realize it means allowing your staff to make mistakes.” A maneuver warfare military believes it is better to have high levels of initiative among subordinate officers, with a resultant rapid Boyd Cycle, even if the price is some mistakes.

Doesn't the superior lose control if his subordinates have a great deal of freedom to make their own decisions? The historical record quickly shows this is not the case. Generals George Patton and Bruce Clark both used mission-type orders in World War II. The German army has used mission-type orders for over a century, yet it has not been an army that was "out of control." What changes is the way control is achieved. Instead of controlling by telling the subordinate what to do and then demanding constant reports to show he is doing it, control comes through the intent and the mission. Indeed, control is really replaced with guidance, while the intent and the mission "glue" the force together.

There are a number of misconceptions about mission-type orders. Some of the more common are:

"In a mission-type order, the battalion commander just orders his company commander to 'attack and seize hill 207.' He does not tell him how to do it." Sometimes, a mission-type order may tell you to take a specific piece of ground. But more often, it will tell you what your commander wants you to do to the enemy. Instead of "attack and seize hill 207," it will say, "attack the enemy in the left flank through hill 207." In this case, if the company commander sees that hill 207 is not the best route to the enemy's flank, he will take another route on his own authority. If possible, he will inform his battalion commander of the change in plans. But he will act first, inform later.

"A mission-type order just tells you to defeat the enemy." There is more to it than that in most cases. Your commander has a responsibility to think through a way to defeat the enemy, and to communicate that clearly to you. He must tell you, "here is what I want to do to the enemy." You must know what he has in mind, and think through what that means for your unit. Then you must make sure your subordinates understand what you are thinking.

"Mission-type orders mean you can do whatever you want." In many cases, you can largely "do what you want" in terms of means, but not ends. Your actions must always fit in with what your commander is trying to accomplish --with his intent and the mission. If he also suggests some means, you cannot disregard his suggestions, but if you find that the situation changes or is different from what your commander envisaged, you put the ends above the means and do what you think is appropriate.

What do mission orders look like? A historical example can help answer this.

In July of 1941 the 78th Infantry Division of the German Army had crossed the Dnieper about 100 kilometers south of Mogilev, with orders to advance on the town of Krichev. The division commander, General Curt Gallenkamp, issued this order preparatory to an attack on July 25:

1. Enemy forces numbering at least one Soviet division in the area south of Mogilev endanger the ordered advance of the division in the left flank. The enemy situation to the northeast, where heavily motorized traffic has been reported, is not yet clear.
2. On the morning of 25 July, the 78th Division will attack and destroy the enemy group south of Mogilev. For the duration of the attack the division will be attached to VII Corps.
3. For this purpose the following units will be assembled prior to 0600 hours on 25 July:
 - a. The 195th Infantry with 4th Battery, 178th Artillery...It will be the mission of 195th Infantry to concentrate its main effort on pinning down the enemy on its front on both sides of the road to Mogilev and to push him steadily northward.
 - b. The 238th Infantry...The task of the 238th Infantry will be to concentrate its main effort on the right, attack the enemy on its front and to drive him back. The regiment will direct its main attention to the prevention of any enemy action against the left flank of the 215th Infantry attacking on the right of the 238th Infantry.
 - c. To the right of the boundary line separating it from the 238th Regiment, the 215th Regiment will organize its forces on both sides of the road leading northward to the

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