

ARMOR



May-June 1987

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"MAGNET"

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Mission Tactics

by Captain John F. Antal

The May 1986 edition of the U.S. Army's FM 100-5, *Operations*, states that the dynamics of combat power decide the outcome of battle. Combat power is measured by the effect created by combining maneuver, firepower, protection, and leadership in combat actions against an enemy in war. AirLand Battle doctrine demands a command and control system that is superior to the enemy's. To gain this superiority, AirLand Battle doctrine stresses the use of mission orders; orders that specify *what* must be done without prescribing *how* the mission must be accomplished. The aim of mission orders is to "leave the greatest possible operational and tactical freedom to subordinate leaders,"¹ and thus gain speed in decisive execution over the enemy.

Indeed, it may be said that an army's war-fighting style, as displayed in its command and control philosophy, is often *the* decisive element of combat power. But is our training keeping pace with doctrine? Is the U.S. Army practicing the techniques required to develop the superior command and control system that will win on the battlefield? This discussion contrasts U.S. war-fighting command styles with Soviet styles and proposes techniques to improve the communication of mission tactics, a technique that emphasizes the traditional strengths of the U.S. Army.

Orders-Oriented Tactics

The Soviet war-fighting style is aptly described by the German military term *Befehlstaktik*, or orders-

oriented tactics. Orders-oriented tactics epitomize attrition warfare, a method of warfare that suits the Soviet style of war and plays to the Soviet numerical advantage. The Soviet system of command is derived from a bureaucratic Soviet society that emphasizes exaggerated planning and the uninterrupted control of almost every aspect of an individual's existence. The Soviet system, therefore, is orders-intensive and orders-dependent. "Divisions and lower organizations are required to fight according to a detailed battle plan which specifies the who, what, when, and how for every part of their operations."²

Nothing is left to chance or independent judgment. The Soviets expect their leaders to execute the plan efficiently. Improvisation be-

Mission Tactics, Operations Order Format

1. Situation

- a. Enemy Forces
- b. Friendly Forces
- c. Attachments/Detachments
- d. Commander's Intent — A clear statement of the intent (what is to be accomplished) of the commanders two echelons up.

2. Mission — A clear statement of what the unit is to do, usually defined in terms of the enemy, not the terrain.

3. Execution

— Commander's intent — A clear statement of the intent (how the battle will be fought) of the commander of the unit that is to accomplish the mission. The commander's intent is explained in the terms of the AirLand Battle:

- Close operations — how the commander intends to fight the close-in battle. The focus of the main effort must be clearly stated.
- Deep operations — how the commander intends to fight deep operations within his area of interest (optional for units below brigade level). Deep operations are aimed at inhibiting the freedom of action and cohesion of the enemy.
- Rear operations — how the commander intends to fight the rear operations battle. The aim of rear operations is to retain freedom of action to continue operations.

- a. Concept of the operation
- b. Subordinate unit missions
- c. Coordinating instructions

4. Service support

5. Command and signal

- a. Signal instructions
- b. Command posts and the location of the commander

Figure 1

yond the letter of the order is not encouraged. "Any Soviet officer who acts on the American premise that regulations are but a guide... will probably have a very short, undistinguished military career."³ The Soviet command style, therefore, is at a disadvantage in a fast-paced, mobile war, where events do not always go according to plan. In such a war, the synchronization of combat power will depend on the mental agility of junior leaders to seize and retain the initiative.

Mission Tactics

The concept of *Auftragstaktik* or "mission tactics" is not new to warfare. The Prussians in the mid-19th century adopted "mission tactics" as the logical method to control the

decentralization of the battlefield brought about by the technological improvements of the rifle and field cannon. This increase in the killing capabilities of more modern weapons forced armies to seek safety in greater dispersion. It was no longer possible to lead men in a tight mass formation. The Germans attacked this problem with historical military thoroughness and determined that there were two methods of battlefield control on the decentralized battlefield.

One method, the attempt to plan for every eventuality and seek precision in execution through the strict adherence to a pre-arranged plan, was adopted by the Soviet Union and is described above. The "German solution" is the antithesis of

the orders-oriented process. This process was labeled "mission tactics."

Mission tactics are based upon trust. Leaders are expected to make decisions without constant supervision and without asking for permission as long as their decisions are within the framework of the commander's intent. Mission tactics replace control with guidance and allow the subordinate leader to "do without question or doubt whatever the situation requires... Even the disobedience of orders was not inconsistent with this philosophy."⁴

Mission tactics are the preferred method of waging maneuver warfare. The technique is as much a mental thought process as it is a tactical concept. The point is always to gain a time-decision advantage over your enemy. Any command and control method that increases your speed of decision and action should be employed. To gain this time-decision advantage the following command and control elements are essential: (1) employ mission type orders, (2) shorten tactical reports by reporting by "exception," and (3) develop well-trained and trusted subordinate leaders.

Mission Type Orders

Mission type orders are designed to speed up the decision-reaction cycle and gain the initiative over the enemy. An example of a mission type operations order is shown in figure one. The mission order is different from the standard five-paragraph field order in three significant ways:

- **SITUATION**; paragraph 1.d: The commander's intent is added to clearly explain how the battle is visualized by the commanders two echelons above the unit that will execute the order.

- **MISSION**; paragraph 2: The mission statement, in a mission type order, is usually defined in terms of the enemy, not the terrain.

- **EXECUTION**; paragraph 3.a, includes the commander's intent, which clearly states how the commander visualizes the battle and why. The focus of the main effort is designated.

The mission order should be issued orally, from brigade level down, to preclude unnecessary time delays. A verbal order issued by the commander on the battlefield is better

than a written order, prepared in quantity, but issued late.

Reporting By Exception

In the confusion and "fog" of battle, commander's concentrate on fighting their units. Reporting to higher headquarters takes a back seat to the deadly business of maneuvering against the enemy. Reporting by exception accepts this phenomenon and trusts subordinate leaders to continue the mission as established by the commander's intent. Major successes or failures are the only reports that are transmitted over the command frequency. Higher headquarters should employ the "eavesdrop" technique of listening in on subordinate radio nets, without interfering with the command and control of the fighting units. With commanders forward, the need for reports is lessened further still.

Trained Subordinate Leaders

Distractors in garrison consume inordinate amounts of time which should be spent on training leaders for combat. Commanders must relieve their subordinates of these mundane, non-war-fighting tasks that drive much of our day-to-day peacetime training. When leaders fail to develop subordinate leaders in garrison, they lack trust in their leaders on the battlefield and are reluctant to delegate tasks and authority to these leaders in combat.

Commanders must develop subordinate leaders capable of seizing and exploiting battlefield opportunities and trust these subordinates to take such actions within the guidance established by the commander's intent.

Junior leaders must also become



tactically proficient with their weapons and the employment of their units (both the science and the art of war). This can be accomplished by concentrating their time on a serious study of war. Only when commanders set priorities, designating training hours for study, wargaming, and war seminars will junior leaders have the opportunity to mature and develop into the kind of leaders capable of fighting under the mission tactics style of maneuver warfare.⁵

Conclusion

The U.S. Army's ability to defeat the Soviets in battle will be determined by our ability to execute the elements of combat power. The Soviet Army's greatest weakness is their orders-oriented approach to battle. Mission tactics attack this Soviet weakness by launching a series of aggressive actions and counteractions that are designed to disrupt the pre-planned sequence of the orders-oriented approach to battle. By confronting the enemy with surprising and unanticipated situations, we can multiply the potential of men, weapons, and combat re-

sources into superior combat power. To develop this combat power, the U.S. Army must be deadly serious about the training and development of its junior leaders. Techniques such as the use of mission orders and reporting by exception must be the norm, not the exception.

Mission tactics is a concept that seeks fast, decentralized decision making. It is an important concept to the success of the AirLand Battle and must have immediate emphasis in all our tactical training. We desperately need leaders who can operate decisively with minimum guidance. These leaders are our greatest combat multiplier.



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Footnotes

¹Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., May 1986, p. 21. On page 22, the manual states that, "if an unanticipated situation arises, committed maneuver unit commanders should understand the purpose of the operation well enough to act decisively, confident that they are doing what their superior commander would order done were he present."

²Lieutenant Colonel William A. Walker, USA (Ret.), "The Deep Battle," *ARMY Magazine*, July 1986, p. 28.

³Lieutenant Colonel William P. Baxter, USA (Ret.), *Soviet AirLand Battle Tactics*, Presidio Press, Novato, Calif., 1986, p. 71. For

an excellent summary of the Soviet command and staff system, see Chapter 3 of *Soviet AirLand Battle Tactics*.

⁴Lieutenant Colonel John A. English, *A Perspective on Infantry*, Praeger Publishers, N.Y., 1981, p. 76. On page 76, LTC English further states that "as far as the Germans were concerned, the first demand in war was decisive action."

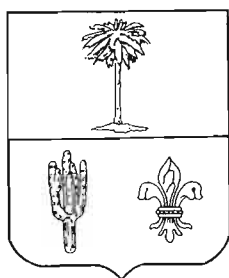
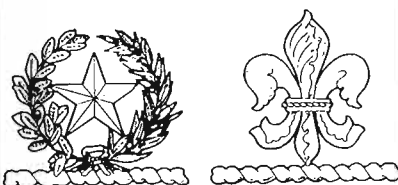
⁵William S. Lind, *Maneuver Warfare Handbook*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1985, p. 44. Lind's book on maneuver warfare is an excellent collection of lectures and tactical problems that highlight the techniques of maneuver warfare, officer education and tactical reform.

163d Armored Cavalry

(First Montana)

Men, Do Your Duty

Lineage and Honors



Symbolism

The palm tree represents Philippine service, the giant cactus Mexican border duty and the fleur-de-lis service in France during World War I. Blue and white are the colors associated with infantry and refer to the organization's combat service as the 163d Infantry during World War II.

Distinctive Insignia

The distinctive insignia is the shield and motto of the coat of arms.

Organized during 1884-1887 in the Montana National Guard as the 1st Regiment of Infantry. Mustered into Federal service 5-10 May 1898 at Helena as the 1st Montana Volunteer Infantry; mustered out 17 October 1899 at San Francisco, California.

Reorganized 30 May 1901 - 1 December 1903 in the Montana National Guard as the 2d Infantry Regiment. Mustered into Federal service 27 June 1916 at Fort William H. Harrison, Montana, for service on the Mexican border; mustered out 3 November 1916 at Fort William H. Harrison, Montana. Called into Federal service 25 March 1917 and mustered in 7 April 1917 at Fort William H. Harrison, Montana; drafted into Federal service 5 August 1917. Consolidated 19 September 1917 with the 3d Battalion, 3d Infantry Regiment (District of Columbia National Guard); consolidated unit reorganized and redesignated as the 163d Infantry, an element of the 41st Division. Demobilized 21 February 1919 at Camp Dix, New Jersey.

Former Montana elements of the 163d Infantry reorganized during 1921-1922 in the Montana National Guard as the 2d Infantry. Redesignated 1 May 1922 as the 163d Infantry, an element of the 41st Division, subsequently the 41st Infantry Division; Headquarters Federally recognized 30 January 1924 at Helena. Location of Headquarters changed 29 December 1939 to Billings. Inducted into Federal Service 16 September 1940 at Billings. Inactivated 31 December 1945 in Japan. Relieved 17 June 1946 from assignment to the 41st Infantry Division. Reorganized June 1946 from assignment to the 41st Infantry Division. Reorganized and Federally recognized 21 April 1947 with Headquarters at Bozeman.

Converted and redesignated 1 March 1953 as the 163d Armored Cavalry. (3d Squadron allotted 1 March 1968 to the Oregon Army National Guard — separate lineage.)

Home Area: Statewide (less 3d Squadron in Oregon).

Campaign Participation Credit

Philippine Insurrection

Manila
Malolos

World War I

Streamer without inscription

World War II

Papua
New Guinea (with arrowhead)
Luzon
Southern Philippines (with arrowhead)

Decorations

Decorations

Presidential Unit Citation (Army), Streamer embroidered PAPUA (U.S. Army Forces in the Far East cited; WD GO 21, 1943)

Philippine Presidential Unit Citation, Streamer embroidered 17 OCTOBER 1944 TO 4 JULY 1945 (163d Infantry cited; DA GO 47, 1950)