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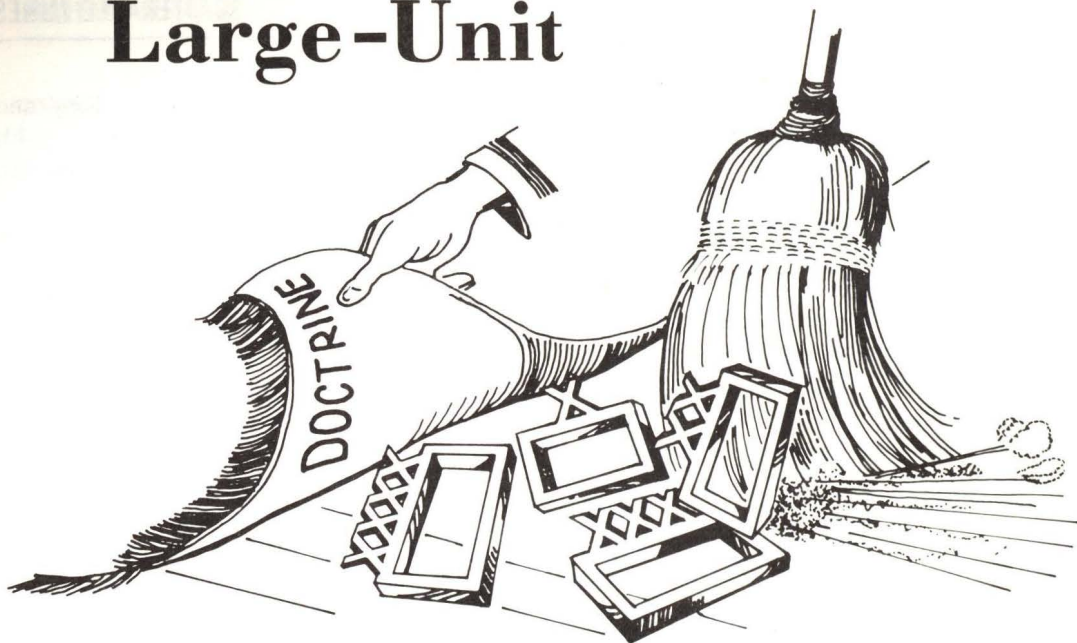
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Large-Unit



Operational Doctrine

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The US Army clearly articulated its doctrine on how small units (division and below) will fight in its capstone manual FM 100-5, Operations. However, there is a doctrinal vacuum on how echelons above division (EAD) will operate. FM 100-15, Corps Operations, which is scheduled for publication in 1979, should fill part of this void. The author is concerned that EAD doctrine cover at least three major areas. These are: a statement concerning the nature of large-unit combat and preconceived maneuver; an explanation of the indirect approach; and means of achieving true concentration on the battlefield. An extension of small-unit tactics to fit corps operations does not appear to be a feasible solution to the problem.

LARGE-UNIT operations are passé. This is the argument of some contemporary writers who contend that nuclear weapons and other technological advances have combined to ensure that combat will continue to be limited in many respects, particularly the size of units. Short, in-

tense and lethal battles at the division and brigade level are the scenarios most often suggested. Yet other possibilities exist. Perhaps the US Army will field and fight large units. As the United States looks toward Europe, the leviathan proportions of Warsaw Pact conventional ground

forces make protracted combat with large units a real possibility.

Is the US Army fully prepared for this type of conflict? One weakness appears to be the lack of clear doctrine at the echelons above division (EAD) level. Preoccupation with a "six-day, come as you are" war has led doctrinal publications to deal almost exclusively with division and lower operations. A doctrinal vacuum has developed at the corps and above level. This article will discuss that issue—the US Army does not have, and must develop, a clear statement of its large-unit combat doctrine. Furthermore, it will suggest that a basis for EAD doctrine exists, but it must be organized and articulated.

The first step is to establish some working definitions of key terms. Doctrine is one of those ordinary words which are used so often that most people have an intuitive understanding of its meaning. However, doctrine is not that easy to define. It has been defined by one contemporary general officer as "what usually works best." The *Dictionary of United States Army Terms* definition is:

Fundamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of national objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application.

As used in this article, doctrine is simply the principles which guide the planning and conduct of combat operations. Doctrine is not a rigid recipe for success on the battlefield. The commander in the field must realize that he may deviate from any given principle when the situation dictates.

With this understanding of doctrine in hand, the remaining key terms may be defined. Strategy is defined by

Liddell Hart as "the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill policy."¹ This definition is appropriate for this article.

A suitable definition of tactics is more difficult to find. Some definitions stress the subordinate relationship of tactics to strategy. Others concentrate on the size of units to which tactics apply. For the purposes of this discussion, tactics is the arrangement and control of forces near or in contact with opposing forces. Finally, for the limited purposes of this article, large units are corps and above, and small units are division and below.

The defining of these terms is essential for two reasons. First is to specify the meaning associated with each term. Second is to point out that the very process of defining strategy and tactics has curiously contributed to the EAD doctrine vacuum. Most definitions allude to the overlapping of strategy and tactics. The line between these concepts is not clear, and a large gray area exists. It is in this "twilight zone" between strategy and tactics that large units habitually operate.

EAD operations are neither pure strategy nor pure tactics, and it is understandable that the development of clear large-unit doctrine has been overlooked. Today's military literature is replete with articles describing the tactics of small-unit defense or exploring the strategy of nuclear deterrence. However, few analysts address the ill-defined area of large-unit operations. The result is that there is no current document in the US Army that deals specifically with EAD doctrine.²

It seems worthwhile at this point to mention the Soviet approach to this problem. Their concept of operational

art is designed to deal with the ambiguous area between strategy and tactics. The Soviet tripartite approach of strategy, operational art and tactics distinguishes between national policy, operations of the army and *front*, and operations at division and below. Distinct concepts and doctrine exist for each of these three levels.

Soviet personnel are specifically trained to plan large-unit operations. Marshal Sokolovsky claims that the concept of operational art "has found clear expression only in Soviet military science."³ While this boast may be somewhat of an exaggeration, suffice it to say that the Soviets have outdistanced the United States in recognizing a distinct requirement for large-unit combat doctrine.

Transition Problem

The problem of an EAD doctrine vacuum also is caused in part by overlooking the difficulty in moving from division to higher level planning. The current curriculum of the US Army Command and General Staff College (USACGSC) provides an example of this notion. At the USACGSC, students are required to work on a single tactical problem at multiple command levels, and common principles are applied at each echelon. Combat resources are successively allocated at corps, division and brigade level using the same techniques. The student completes the problem with the impression that corps through brigade operations are a continuum. This is a false assumption. The movement up from division to corps operations is a quantum leap. This thought is well-

expressed in the foreword to *Maneuver in War*, a standard USACGSC text during the 1930s:

*In the academic sequence of instruction at the Command and General Staff School, there is a period of transition from the reinforced brigade and division to the corps and army. It is in the nature of things that this transition is abrupt. The intelligent manipulation, even on paper, of the masses represented by the corps and army, call for a strategic imagination of a high order.*⁴

Losing sight of this "abrupt transition" has caused some planners to assume that what works well at brigade will work equally well at corps. The lack of specific EAD doctrine is partially attributable to the popular assumption that the US Army may apply its current doctrine at all levels. This is a dangerous assumption. Skills developed at one level are not automatically exportable to higher level. For example, the transition from brigade commander to corps operations officer, both O-6 billets, requires tremendous intellectual and psychological adjustment. The principles and skills which must be mastered in each position are herculean, but are as different as the skills of a stonemason and an architect.

The assertion that the US Army lacks clear large-unit combat doctrine may be rejected by the reader. The case for the premise of an EAD doctrine vacuum rests on two supporting arguments. First, there is no current publication which specifically covers EAD operational doctrine. Field Manual (FM) 100-15, *Corps Operations*, is scheduled for publication in 1979. What this manual will contain in its final form is not known.

The draft indicates this FM will be an extension of current small-unit tactical doctrine to the corps level—the very problem that must be solved. In fairness, it should be noted that the draft does make a meaningful move in the right direction, particularly in Chapter 3 where the indirect approach and concentration are discussed as they apply to the corps level. A separate corps operations manual is a positive step, but one that breaks no new ground is an imperfect solution. Certainly, EAD doctrine must be “in consonance with FM 100-5,” but it also must be more than just a restatement of small-unit tactical doctrine.

Current operational doctrine is not adequate EAD doctrine. FM 100-5, *Operations*, “capstone” of the new family of manuals, is widely accepted as expressing combat doctrine for the “general,” “colonel” and “captain.” It tells these commanders, in general terms, how to fight. But it is predominately small-unit tactics. It does little for the EAD planner except perpetuate the myth that tactics are tactics regardless of the level. Professor Archer Jones critiques FM 100-5 in a February 1978 *Military Review* article. He takes a balanced view, but is generally favorable in his comments. However, Jones points out the lack of EAD doctrine by stating:

*The manual does not address certain questions which, though they lie within the province of the maneuver of corps and armies, might well have received brief consideration. From Napoleon to World War I, good generals rarely attacked in front; they always turned a position.*⁵

Another shortcoming that prevents FM 100-5 from serving as EAD doctrine is the notion that principles

developed for battle in Central Europe “apply also to military operations anywhere in the world.”⁶ Colonel General Lothar Rendulic coined the phrase “command according to terrain” to describe a commander’s obsession with terrain to the exclusion of other principles.⁷ On the Eastern Front in World War II, German forces occupying key terrain were often flanked by Russians seeking an indirect approach. When terrain-dictated solutions to tactical problems prevailed, defeat was probable. What worked in Western Europe, and for the Germans that normally meant occupying key terrain, did not always work in Russia.

Doctrine that is based on specific terrain, such as Central Europe, is a specific solution, and there are inherent dangers in exporting that doctrine to other situations. EAD doctrine must transcend its environment.

Thus far, it has been shown that the US Army does not have adequate EAD doctrine. There is no published EAD doctrine, and current manuals stress small-unit operations in a specific theater. It is now time to propose a means of dealing with this problem. It should be clear that semantic gymnastics are not the answer. To continue current trends of applying doctrine across the board, and then call EAD operations “operational art” or “grand tactics,” begs the question.

Definitive EAD doctrine must be developed and published. This article would not presume to state what should be the sum and substance of US EAD doctrine. It will merely suggest two things: A basis for EAD doctrine is available, and it will outline what appear to be the essential characteristics of adequate EAD doctrine.

Available military literature forms a workable basis for EAD doctrine. The works of Fuller, Liddell Hart, Guderian and others contain a great deal of information concerning the principles of large-unit operations. Military history has a unique contribution to make to EAD doctrine. Pre-World War II texts, such as *Maneuver in War*, also add to the data bank. There are numerous resources, but the nature of combat in the last 30 years has caused the US Army to slight this area of research. One legacy of Vietnam was doctrinal myopia. Great progress has been made in improving small-unit tactical doctrine. The same must be done with EAD doctrine. The material is available. It must be dusted off, organized and articulated.

A logical question arises concerning the applicability of military history and 1930s textbooks to modern warfare. Some people claim that even the lessons of World War II are not germane to combat today. This notion denies the facts of history. The lessons of Cannae were duplicated at Cowpens and will be taught again on some future battlefield. "The hydrogen bomb does not change the basis or practice of strategy."⁸ Korea and Vietnam reinforced this point.

If one accepts the existence of "basic and inviolable laws of the art of war,"⁹ the task of characterizing EAD doctrine is made easier. Adequate EAD doctrine might contain any number of these proven principles, but three seem essential. A statement concerning the nature of large-unit combat and the preconceived maneuver, an explanation of the indirect approach and means of achieving true concentration are necessary parts of EAD doctrine.

A successful EAD planner must

develop an understanding of the nature of large-unit combat. He must have a feel for how the battle will develop and how his plans will affect the outcome. He must appreciate the importance of the commander's maneuver decision and the criticality of its timing. The timing of the maneuver decision is dictated by the assumptions made concerning the structure of battle at the EAD level.

Two Theories

Two theories concerning the structure of battle at the EAD level have developed over the years. One theory suggests that the outcome of a particular battle is the result of a master stroke delivered at some decisive point and time. Just as modern television's instant replay can isolate the blow that renders a boxer unconscious, the outcome of large-unit combat may be traced to a single critical action.

Acceptance of this theory implies that the large-unit commander cannot make his maneuver decision in advance. He must close with the enemy, discern the critical time and place, and then order the final blow. A preconceived maneuver is not considered. The commander may not decide in advance to "envelop the right flank," simply because the right flank may not be the critical point. He must delay his decision until the battle develops and be prepared to deliver the *coup de grâce* whenever and wherever required.

An opposing view theorizes that the outcome of large-unit combat is the total result of its component smaller

actions. Acceptance of this notion implies that a single critical action cannot be identified. The outcome of the battle will be determined by the success of smaller units, and these units will fight from the formations in which they are deployed when the battle begins.

Further, the initial disposition of forces is critical. Delaying deployment of one's forces in hopes of identifying a critical point and time is fruitless. The maneuver decision is always made in advance. The commander decides to "envelop the right flank," and then deploys his forces accordingly. The preconceived maneuver is mandatory. If each subordinate unit completes its assigned task, a favorable result is assured. Once the battle is joined, the EAD commander has little control over the combat. He may change only details of the plan.

The vast majority of evidence points to the validity of the second theory and the fact that the outcome of large-unit combat is the total result of several smaller actions.¹⁰ The concept of a preconceived maneuver becomes critical. The commander who delays or refuses to make a decision in advance of battle is lost.

Large units must enter combat with a clear understanding of their intended maneuver. An army or corps cannot "stagger into battle looking for a decisive place and time." The EAD commander must anticipate the actions of the enemy and plan ahead. For the EAD commander, "to command is to foresee."¹¹ The current emphasis on the corps commander "seeing the battlefield" to a depth of 150 kilometers is an expression of this concept. An essential part of EAD doctrine must be an explicit statement about the nature

of large-unit combat and the importance of the preconceived maneuver.

Two points must be made before leaving the subject of the preconceived maneuver. First, the EAD planner must realize that, in reality, very little goes exactly according to plan. Field Marshal Rommel states:

When two armies meet on the battlefield, each of the opposing commanders has his own particular plan according to which he intends to engage his enemy, and the battle develops out of the two opposing plans. Only rarely in history has battle gone completely according to the plan of either side and then usually because either the victor has had absolute quantitative or qualitative superiority or the loser has been utterly incompetent.¹²

However, the fact that battle rarely unfolds exactly as outlined on the commander's map case does not negate the importance of the preconceived maneuver. The unit that enters battle with no plan has little or no chance of a favorable outcome.

The second point is to clarify the role of the EAD commander. The EAD commander makes his primary contribution before the battle begins—he makes the preconceived maneuver decision. A preconceived maneuver includes the presumption that once the battle begins only details of the plan may be changed. But these details may include important decisions such as committing reserves, reconstituting reserves or ordering an exploitation. The large unit enters combat committed to a certain course of action and must rely on subordinate units for success, but the EAD commander's role continues, though limited in scope, until the battle is decided.

Remaining Principles

The remaining principles—the indirect approach and concentration, are concepts as old as warfare. Most readers will recognize immediately what follows as a restatement of B. H. Liddell Hart's thoughts on these subjects. The intent is not to present him as the consummate tactician or suggest that his ideas be accepted *in toto*. The intent is to recommend that these concepts be included in EAD doctrine because they are vitally important.

The principle of the indirect approach might well be best understood as an indictment of the frontal attack. This axiom states that there is never justification for sending "troops to a direct attack upon an enemy firmly in position."¹³ A flank must be turned. The enemy must be dislocated. Something must be done, but never a direct assault. Brigadier General Yigal Allon of the Israeli army described the indirect approach as "attacking from the most unexpected and therefore least defended direction."¹⁴

The argument is often made that a corps' indirect approach, such as an envelopment, becomes a frontal attack for some squad. While technically true, even the squad leader has some choice in his method of attack. He may flank a position or use some sort of indirect fire to dislocate the enemy. The competent leader will find some means other than a frontal assault. The EAD commander and planner must realize that the indirect approach is a state of mind that seeks to avoid direct and costly confrontations. This principle is

straightforward, simple in nature and must be included in any acceptable EAD doctrine.

The principle of concentration is not as simple as the indirect approach. An intuitive understanding of concentration as "getting there first with the most" is not sufficient. Certainly, the maxim of concentration dictates having superior forces at some point before the enemy can react, but this tells us nothing about how to gain that advantage. Real concentration is achieved by understanding the complex relationships between friendly and enemy movements on the modern battlefield. As Liddell Hart explains:

*Effective concentration can only be obtained when the opposing forces are dispersed; and, usually, in order to insure this, one's own forces must be widely distributed. Thus, by an outward paradox, true concentration is the product of dispersion. . . . Your dispersion, his dispersion, your concentration—such is the sequence, and each is a sequel. True concentration is the fruit of calculated dispersion.*¹⁵

These three principles—preconceived maneuver, indirect approach and concentration—appear to form a solid foundation for EAD doctrine. As this doctrine is developed, it must be kept adaptable to changes in technology and environment. It should be expressed in terms that make it applicable anywhere.

Staff officers and commanders must be prepared to apply EAD doctrine intellectually. Military history, in the sense of studying great campaigns of the past, should be included in this preparation. Nurturing of "strategic imagination" will be necessary. Officers competent in achieving

“calculated dispersion,” which must be recognized as taking a calculated risk, will be gained by study and training designed to address the special problems of EAD operations.

Before concluding, a brief statement concerning the impact of adoption of EAD doctrine as proposed above seems in order. The first consideration was just stated—we must begin training staff officers with the qualifications for high-level operational planning.

Secondly, the location and function of the corps commander must be re-examined. If the preconceived maneuver concept is accepted, the corps commander and staff must realize their job is done, in large part, once the battle begins. Perhaps the corps commander should locate himself farther to the rear than currently envisioned and

spend more time planning the second battle rather than leading by example in the first.

Finally, the concept that great leaders are made not born is reinforced. The ability to maneuver corps and armies successfully appears to be more the product of study and hard work than the result of a “spontaneous flash of light.”¹⁶

This article has presented the outline for and urged the adoption of specific EAD doctrine. It has not attempted to deal with every aspect of the subject. Great gaps, such as EAD doctrine in the face of the apparent primacy of the defense, exist. But these details may be worked out by better minds once the need for EAD doctrine is accepted.

NOTES

1 B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, Praeger Publishers Inc., N.Y., 1967, p 335.

2 At this time, there are no US Army field manuals (FMs) which deal specifically with large-unit operational doctrine. FM 100-15, *Corps Operations*, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., is scheduled for publication in 1979. An operations manual dealing with echelons above corps is also being developed.

3 V. D. Sokolovsky, *Soviet Military Strategy*, Edited by Harriet Fast Scott, Crane, Russak & Co., N.Y., 1975, p 6.

4 Wilson B. Burt, from the foreword to Charles A. Willoughby, *Maneuver in War*, Military Service Publishing Co., Harrisburg, Pa., 1939.

5 Archer Jones, “The New FM 100-5: A View From the Ivory Tower,” *Military Review*, February 1978, p 30.

6 FM 100-5, *Operations*, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., 1 July 1976, p 1-2.

7 Lothar Rendulic, “Command Decision,” an appendix to James Mrazek, *The Art of Winning Wars*, Walker & Co., N.Y., 1968, p 178.

8 Liddell Hart, *op. cit.*, p 13.

9 Douglas MacArthur, quoted in Willoughby, *op. cit.*, p 1.

10 The scope of this article does not permit a rigorous proof of this point. The interested reader should see Chapter 3, Willoughby, *op. cit.*, for a detailed discussion.

11 *Ibid.*, p 58.

12 Erwin Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, Edited by B. H. Liddell Hart, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., N.Y., 1953, p 519.

13 Liddell Hart, *op. cit.*, p 164.

14 Yigal Allon, “The Making of Israel’s Army,” *The Theory and Practice of War*, Edited by Michael Howard, Praeger Publishers Inc., N.Y., 1966, p 366.

15 Liddell Hart, *op. cit.*, pp 343 and 347.

16 Mrazek, *op. cit.*, p 104. Mrazek presents the hypothesis that great leaders are successful because they are creative. This creativity is an internal resource and cannot be gained by rigorously adhering to principles, but is more an instantaneous apprehension of the solution to a problem.



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