

FM 100-5:

The AirLand Battle in 1986

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The publication of US Army Field Manual (FM) 100-5, Operations, in August 1982 launched AirLand Battle as the Army's doctrine of the future. Such a revolutionary change, however, was not automatically accepted by everyone and caused some consternation and debate among our NATO allies as well as the Army's sister services. In this March 1986 article, General William R. Richardson outlines the 1986 modifications to the 1982 FM 100-5, noting that "the unmistakable conclusion remains that the 1982 edition of FM 100-5 was on target."

SUCCESS IN WAR DEMANDS total preparation. The combat leader must know how to fight, how to marshal his courage and that of his soldiers, and how to bring his forces to bear at the critical time and place on the battlefield to impose his will on the enemy.

The US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) is dedicated to preparing the Army's leaders for war. That role embraces three distinct elements of preparation: intellectual, psychological and physical. Intellectual preparation begins with the textbook in the classroom but moves quickly to the map, to the sand table and then to the terrain. Intellectual preparation provides the mental basis for a broad perspective on warfighting by thoroughly and systematically searching military history while scanning the future for new technology and new concepts.

Psychological preparation enjoins the leader to commit himself to professional excellence and to develop the tactical and technical competence which lay the foundation for both the leader's confidence and the unit's cohesion and successful performance. Physical preparation is rooted in self-discipline. It requires the leader to set and demand high standards of fitness for himself and his soldiers; to execute tactics, techniques and procedures with precision; and to apply sound doctrine in every training opportunity and exercise. While difficult to estimate the complexity of these tasks, it is impossible to exaggerate their necessity.

Reading, understanding and applying doctrine are fundamental to the preparation for war. Doctrine describes how the Army will fight and support. Not only does doctrine govern training strategies in both

units and schools, but it also directs force modernization efforts and helps orchestrate standardization and interoperability efforts with our sister services and our allies. As doctrine changes, so must the Army.

I want to impress upon the officer corps that Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*, is the primary tool for the self-education and professional development required to achieve tactical competence. Without mastering the AirLand Battle, leaders will inevitably fall short in preparing for war.

The 1982 edition of FM 100-5 reintroduced a fundamental concept to the US Army—the operational level of war. Yet, the manual neither fully described the operational level as the linchpin between strategy and tactics nor clearly differentiated between tactical and operational warfighting. The new manual does these things. It explains that campaigns and major operations constitute the operational level of war and that battles and engagements encompass tactical operations. In a major conflict, field armies, army groups, and joint and allied major commands will fight at the operational level. Divisions, brigades and regiments will fight at the tactical level. The transition occurs at corps which can and will operate at both the operational and tactical levels.

In the Korean War, for example, the X Corps conducted a major independent operation—the Inchon landing, clearly an operational-level action with strategic impact. Similarly, today's corps, the Army's largest unit of maneuver, may conduct major operations which have significant impact on the strategic aims in a given theater. Typically, however, the corps executes tactical actions through battles and engagements to influence

larger operations, to decide the course of campaigns and to achieve strategic objectives. Some mistakenly equated the notions of forward thinking, anticipation and maneuver solely with operational-level endeavors while relegating fire and movement to only tactical undertakings. The new text clarifies these notions and argues that maneuver, anticipation and forward thinking are as broadly applicable as are the principles of war.

In the 1982 edition, leadership and the human dimension of warfare were raised to an equal footing with the “physics” of war—weapons lethality, time, distance, space, speed and materiel quality. Experience in the past four years has reinforced the renewed emphasis on leadership and the crucial relationship between the soldier and his leader. The 1986 version continues to emphasize that leadership, unit cohesion, training, morale, skill and courage collectively provide the decisive and winning edge. The mandate for quality leadership remains unwavering and compelling. From Reserve Officers’ Training Corps programs to noncommissioned officer academies to the National Training Center, Army training and education programs must produce tough, competent leaders.

Some critics of the 1982 edition argued that the AirLand Battle overemphasized the offense. While the 1976 version of FM 100-5 was interpreted as emphasizing defense, the 1982 edition restored balance and more accurately described the offense than its predecessor. Actually, the 1982 version underscored “initiative,” “momentum in the attack,” “quick-minded flexibility,” “violent execution” and “surprise and shock effect,” all characteristics of—and vital to—an offensive spirit. When taken out of context, however, this aggressive terminology appeared to oversell offensive action.

While the new text clearly espouses the offensive spirit as a prerequisite for success on the battlefield even in a defensive posture, it is more carefully articulated to ensure balance and to avoid exaggeration. Within the expanded discussion of the operational level of war, the new manual also explains how offensive actions fit into major defensive operations and campaigns.

Other critics of the 1982 version equated the AirLand Battle doctrine with the deep battle. They asserted that the deep battle was beyond the range of the division’s organic weapons systems and the division commander’s influence. Thus, it could only be fought at the corps level with air assets or longer range indirect fire support weapons. Extending their argument, critics maintained that indirect fires must be dedicated to deep targets, thereby stripping maneuver

forces of their fire support. Hence, the belief emerged that the deep battle was more important than the close or rear battles.

The new edition explains the importance of the deep battle (renamed for the sake of clarity, “deep operations”) by emphasizing the synchronization of all combat operations. While deep, close and rear operations must be mutually supportive, close operations will clearly determine battlefield success or failure, and success in either rear or deep operations can only be measured by its impact on future close operations. Accordingly, the new text emphasizes that operations in depth must be closely integrated with the close fight. High-risk “deep maneuvers” at the division level would be undertaken only if the payoff would produce results that fit the theater commander’s or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) army group commander’s concept or intent.

The modern battlefield demands close and continuous Army-Air Force coordination. Yet, the 1982 edition did not specifically link the Air Force’s theaterwide view of air support with the Army’s operational-level perspective of the AirLand Battle. The new edition recognizes that future campaigns and major operations will be joint undertakings with mutually supporting air and ground functions. Consequently, those functions—air interdiction, counterair operations, reconnaissance and ground maneuver—are best directed from the theater, campaign and major operation perspectives. The theater commander must concentrate air power against objectives critical to the success of the campaign or major operation.

The new manual does not resolve the dilemma of the corps commander who plans for air interdiction to his front and then fails to get it. However, it does point out that, if planning is done properly, the corps commander will know well in advance whether he is or is not likely to get air support. If he is part of the major operation which is the main effort of the campaign (as the X Corps at Inchon), there is little doubt that he will. If he is in an economy-of-force sector, there is a high probability that his sortie allocation will be less than he wants.

The manual does not address Army/Air Force procedural issues, nor does it refer to specific Army/Air Force agreements which may be superseded in the future as the Army and Air Force resolve procedural issues and refine joint tactics, techniques and procedures. Such items will be covered in subordinate manuals which are updated more frequently.

In my judgment, the unmistakable conclusion remains that the 1982 edition of FM 100-5 was on target. Much to our delight, the concepts and ideas

generated significant thought, reflection, investigation and resultant professional debate. In the midst of this legitimate and necessary dialogue, the 1986 version took shape. Challenging the applicability of the AirLand Battle to a variety of scenarios and environments bolstered the value of the new version. Questioning doctrinal principles strengthened their basic foundation.

The resultant doctrine has undergone extraordinary scrutiny and analysis from within the Army and from our allies. The new manual addresses these concerns and adapts to the needs of the Army worldwide.

The NATO review of the 1982 edition raised many significant issues. The crux of the NATO concerns, however, centered on an interpretation of AirLand Battle as US military strategy rather than doctrine. While written at the tactical and operational levels, FM 100-5 was often misinterpreted as a strategic concept rather than US Army doctrine. References to “defeating the enemy” and “decisive action” were misread as strategic rather than tactical and operational injunctions. That viewpoint generated serious questions regarding:

- Wartime objectives.
- Inconsistencies between AirLand Battle and published NATO doctrine.
- Enthusiasm for offensive, cross-border operations.
- Insensitivity toward the use of nuclear and chemical munitions.
- The employment of follow-on forces attack (FOFA).

AirLand Battle doctrine does not address “strategic victory.” Rather, the 1986 edition of FM 100-5 stresses winning at the operational and tactical levels. Not winning is an anathema to the warrior ethos and is professional nonsense. “Winning” in AirLand Battle doctrine means defeating the enemy on the field of battle and destroying his will to resist in engagements and battles of major operations and campaigns that are governed by strategy and national policy. Clearly, tactical success will support allied victory, but defining strategic goals and strategic victory is beyond the purview of FM 100-5.

The 1982 text of FM 100-5 and related briefings and discussions have been viewed as contrary to NATO doctrine and war plans. In the new text, we adopt NATO terminology where appropriate and conscientiously seek to enrich, reinforce and harmonize our doctrine with NATO doctrine. The manual is compatible with Allied Tactical Publication (ATP) 35(A), *Land Force Tactical Doctrine*, and other NATO publications but, by necessity, is more theoretical to satisfy US needs in other theaters. US troops in NATO

can operate in compliance with FM 100-5 and ATP 35(A) without having to violate the precepts of either. AirLand Battle doctrine can be applied at the tactical level of corps, division and below to comply with forward defense-oriented war plans. The expanded text makes this clear.

AirLand Battle doctrine does not espouse a need for cross-border operations in violation of strategy and policy. In fact, the latest version discusses the prohibition of crossing international borders as a major consideration in planning operations and makes clear the primacy of policy and strategy over operations and tactics in all cases. The decision to cross an international border must reside with the strategic command authority.

The 1982 text has been criticized for insensitive language regarding nuclear and chemical weapons employment. The new FM 100-5 acknowledges the strategic significance of nuclear and chemical weapons. The manual also reiterates that the United States has forsworn the first use of chemical weapons and that the release of nuclear or chemical weapons is a strategic decision—again, well beyond the purview of the AirLand Battle doctrine.

A great deal has been said about the differences between AirLand Battle and NATO FOFA. First and foremost, FOFA is a part of the overall Allied Command, Europe (ACE), operational concept for the defense of NATO territory. AirLand Battle, on the other hand, is Army doctrine for worldwide application which will be executed according to the plans and orders of higher commanders and the factors of mission, enemy, terrain, troops and time available (METT-T). Therefore, in Europe, the US Army will apply AirLand Battle doctrine according to the ACE operational concept not only for FOFA but also for other aspects of the ACE concept. Second, FOFA applies explicitly to NATO and, consequently, must accommodate alliance political considerations. AirLand Battle, however, is universally applicable and flexible enough to adapt to legitimate regional and political considerations.

Finally, FOFA relies on a variety of assets employing minimal ground forces. AirLand Battle also employs available air and other assets but relies predominantly on ground forces to affect the close operation. Thus, though distinctions exist between FOFA and AirLand Battle, these are not contradictions. Rather, they are differences which stem from their very nature—differences that disappear in combat because FOFA is directed toward a specific theater, while AirLand Battle doctrine must be tailored to each theater and the factors of METT-T.

In sum, the 1986 edition of FM 100-5 clarifies its doctrinal role, distinguishes between strategic or policy decisions and doctrine and focuses strictly on the operational and tactical levels of war.

In the past few years, the Army has made great strides in adapting to the AirLand Battle doctrinal tenets of initiative, agility, depth and synchronization. There is still a long way to go, however, before our operations in the field truly reflect these tenets. AirLand Battle doctrine must be fully accepted and thoroughly ingrained in the officer corps. Combat leaders must master the doctrine, integrate it into plans and train according to its tenets to issue and execute mission-type orders confidently and decisively.

Only a leader well-grounded in the AirLand Battle can exploit opportunities to fix the enemy and to attack at the decisive point in battle. Only tactical competence soundly based on our doctrine can generate the skills required to fight with audacity and take necessary risks while implementing solutions to the difficult and dangerous problems encountered in war. Mastery of the AirLand Battle is a key ingredient of the warrior ethos and of the total preparation for war.

To instill the tenets of the AirLand Battle in the officer corps, TRADOC is undertaking a number of initiatives. First, within the Department of Tactics at the US Army Command and General Staff College (USACGSC), Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, we will establish a Center for Army Tactics. The Tactics Center will be on the cutting edge of tactical study, teaching, doctrinal writing and evaluating lessons from those recently assigned to combat units.

As the centerpiece for doctrine and tactics, the Tactics Center will ensure the standardization of instruction throughout TRADOC and set the standards for excellence in tactical training for the Army. Only the Army's finest combined arms tacticians will be assigned there. Our students will learn the most current and sound doctrine and tactics from the Army's best. The synergism will elevate to new heights the quality of our intellectual

and psychological preparation for war by improving our doctrinal writing and tactical teaching.

Second, we must demand that subordinate doctrinal manuals add substance to the AirLand Battle tenets. Repeating FM 100-5's definition of initiative, depth, agility and synchronization, for example, does little to train leaders in how to execute those tenets. AirLand Battle must be translated into tactics that combat leaders can apply in exercises as they hone their battlefield skills in preparation for war. Without frequent practice, the tactics and doctrine will remain elusive and vague. We must doctrinally standardize our "hierarchy" of manuals so that consistency is achieved throughout the force.

Finally, TRADOC will develop and publish the best possible doctrine at each service school. I have challenged all commandants to ensure excellence in the doctrinal product that we provide the field. Doctrine must be current, accurate and standardized. Field commanders must then assume the responsibility for executing the Army's doctrine. Commanders and leaders in the field must read, understand and apply doctrine with innovation and creativity in every training opportunity. They must lift doctrine from manuals and map sheets and bring it to life. Only then will we inculcate the AirLand Battle doctrine from the classroom to the maneuver area and, finally, to the battlefield.

The new FM 100-5 is the most important doctrinal manual in the Army. It responds to the questions which its predecessor generated; it clarifies complex concepts, including strategy, operations and tactics; it serves as a solid foundation for evolutionary, doctrinal change; and it is the fundamental text for every Army officer's military education and training. Competent and confident leaders who know *how to fight* will make the difference between defeat and victory on the battlefield. Every officer must understand that the great value of our doctrine is not the final answers it provides but, rather, the impetus it generates toward creative and innovative solutions to the problems of combat. **MR**

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