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**THE CHARACTER OF MODERN WAR:
THEORY-DOCTRINE-PRACTICE
AT THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL**

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FOREWORD

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THE CHARACTER OF MODERN WAR:
THEORY--DOCTRINE--PRACTICE AT THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL

by

Colonel Wallace P. Franz

1. Introduction: The Problem

This paper will deal with the character of modern war at the operational level and how military theory can assist the US Army in the 1980's. The paper will cover the process of converting theory to practice in order to enhance the capability to employ military force in support of national policy. A proper military doctrine developed from the study of military theory can provide more assistance in heightening national security than any number of weapons systems. This is true because a realistic theory takes both material and nonmaterial factors into consideration.

Recent books ("The Third World War" and "Europe Without Defense") and FM 100-5 indicate that modern war will increase in tempo and speed of action. Operations will be more difficult to control. Ground action will continue to develop in the third dimension (helicopter operations). Present command and control measures may very likely be inadequate to cope with the uncertainty of modern war.

General Adan, considered by some to be one of Israel's best armored commanders, covers some of the problems he faced in the 1973 war. Keep in mind the Israeli army was a trained, experienced, professional force familiar with the area of operations and the enemy, led by young talented generals fighting their fifth war.

Historical Example: Adan Division - 8 October

"The radio net was clogged up with noises, fragmented messages and outbursts from Southern Command's intermediate stations."

"Because of the communications difficulties, I felt I was not getting a true picture of the situation. I could see that there was considerable disorder in the units, and I knew I had to tighten my control, but I felt there was no way to do it by radio (fighting over a 40 KM area)."

- Adan's Division had been attacked by its own air force (0700).

- Air support, artillery support, and reinforcements had been promised, but did not materialize.

- Three hours after the attack started, an additional mission was given to the division.

- Adjacent right flank unit moved by higher HQ leaving this flank exposed.

- 1005, 1020, 1025, 1040, 1054 higher HQ calls while Division CO is fighting his brigades. Adan states:

It is difficult to describe what I felt and what I went through in the course of those long hours. War-tested, I had been in pressure situations before. But this time I was commanding a large formation which, on orders from above, I was compelled to disperse over a broad expanse so that it was difficult to maintain control. Despite my excellent observation point, I could see only two of my brigades. Aryeh's brigade was operating beyond the hills, and my only contact with it was via the radio. Communications were terrible. The Egyptians were apparently jamming our nets. I could have overcome this because of my proximity to the brigade commanders, but Southern Command kept bursting into my net. Because we were far from Southern Command HQ, the jamming of that net was more effective. The Command's intermediate stations would override my division command net, trying to relay messages. The intermediate communication procedure was time consuming, and meanwhile the net was occupied.

Critical battlefield situations compel bursting into communication nets. Commanders are trained in and sensitive to the need to free the net for this purpose, but this is not so with the operators in the intermediate stations. Of course, I tried to break into the brigade nets for updating and to issue instructions; but the pace of events taking place simultaneously in each of the three brigade sectors made it exceedingly difficult to keep abreast of the situation, the more so as the brigade commanders were engaged in intensive communications efforts. And all this was under heavy enemy fire. I realized that I was receiving the reports too late and too slowly.

In addition to the problem of increased tempo, the US Army must be prepared to fight outnumbered and yet win the first battle.

Soldiers in the past have been faced with similar situations which required adjustments to the changing requirements of the battlefield. Officers who are ignorant of the past and unaware of the realities of the present will be ill-equipped for the future.

II. Solution to the Problem: Operational Excellence

A. Historical Example: Napoleonic War and Theory.

Prussia's emergence as the greatest military power in Europe in the 19th Century owed its origins to the reform following defeat and humiliation by Napoleon in 1806. The shock of defeat had more of an impact on Prussia than it had on other countries defeated by Napoleon. The Prussian army with the traditions of Frederick the Great had been beaten in one day and the nation was now defenseless. How could this have happened?

Nineteenth century standing armies were becoming larger so that the individual commander, however brilliant, was not able to maintain personal control of the battle. Instead of one massed army, directly under its general's eye and command, an army became a group of small armies (Corps) dispersed over vast areas and seldom brought physically together except on the field of a great battle. Increased fire-power gave the infantry greater scope for maneuver, and with the development of open order tactics, the battle would begin at greater distances and extend over a greater area. The art of war became an art to be pursued upon the map, offering an infinitely greater number of problems and possibilities than ever before. The commander became less a participant in battle than a director of his forces in battle.

This type of warfare was characterized by the ability of a defeated enemy to retreat and fight another day thus reducing the significance of the single pitched battle. Nationalism and industrialization brought tremendous resources to the state. New armies could be created on the foundation of those that had been partially destroyed in battle and a war could take several campaigns to resolve. Napoleon was able to solve this problem through his employment of lightning mobile war.

The French were the first to employ light troops in mass in modern war. These light troops developed flexibility as a result of the initiative of their leaders. The expanded use of light infantry first made its impact at the tactical level, but

it carried implications of far greater magnitude--soldiers need not lose their individuality in order to act in unison. The initiative of the leaders, the flexibility of the units plus Napoleon's strategic and grand tactical maneuver, allowed him to destroy his enemies quickly. The operational level (grand tactics) developed then as commanders sought ways to preclude the enemy's escape after a tactical defeat. This concept required more than just defeating the enemy on the battlefield and pushing him back to a new line or position. The enemy army must be destroyed for generally a nation cannot continue to fight without its army. Nations like Prussia, Germany, and Israel favor this type of mobile war because of the inherent weakness of their states when compared to a number of possible scenarios. Prussia, a small country on the crossroads of central Europe, with no natural barriers to invasion would be at the mercy of her stronger neighbors. What it needed was a strong army that could win wars quickly. The Prussian officers who reformed the nations army learned from the Napoleonic wars how this could be done.

Modern military theory developed out of the analytic study of the campaigns of: Frederick the Great, the French Revolutionary wars, and Napoleon. These studies were conducted by professional soldiers who had years of practical military experience. Clausewitz and Jomini are the most prominent and best known of these professionals. The most enterprising and thorough students of this period of war were certain officers in the Prussian army such as Scharnhorst, Tiedemann, Clausewitz, and York. The purpose of their study was to provide the basis for reform of the Prussian army so that it could fight the French on equal terms.

Theory tells us how things are related and it comes from a detailed study of war. Principles of war are synthesized from the theory of war. These principles then form the basis for doctrine. The Prussian and later German army developed a very significant doctrinal concept from their theory of war--initiative--and its application to mobile war. This theory was the creation of Clausewitz and the

Prussian reformers. They had found the answer to what John Boyd calls the Observation - Orientation - Decision - Action time cycle (others have called this the detection - location - engagement loop at the tactical level) in their military theory.

B. Historical Example: Clausewitz and the Nature of War.

Clausewitz's study of war indicated that the most significant characteristic of war is uncertainty. Clausewitz lists four elements that make up the climate of war: danger, exertion, uncertainty, and chance.

With this in mind, principles and axioms of war would have only marginal value unless officers were at home in the uncertain and changing environment of war. Clausewitz did not hold with the popular 18th century concept that theory should eliminate accident and chance (that theory could dominate reality). He believed it would be more productive and far more realistic to stress the ability of theory to help men deal with surprise, to help them exploit the unforeseen. Recognize the fortuitous (chance) not as a negative, but as a positive force, an indispensable part of reality.

Eighteenth century war theory sought to exclude chance by the Commander's detailed control of the battle. Linear tactics achieved the maximum of movement and fire compatible with close order. Its system of drill and discipline permitted a great measure of automatic control over the troops behavior in battle. This system met the demands of war until it was threatened and superseded by a new principle, more psychological than mechanistic in character, which held that soldiers need not lose their individuality in order to act in unison. Greater responsibility and initiative was required of junior commanders in order to meet the new conditions of modern warfare.

The Prussian reformers studies of Jager and Schutzen (light troops, tirailleurs, Grenzer, etc.) operations led to the idea of developing initiative as the answer to command and control problems of modern war in an environment of uncertainty.

Their studies indicated the importance of initiative and freedom of action on the part of subordinate leaders in this new type of warfare. Warfare that was characterized by these changes:

1. From Frederickian linear tactics to the massive use of skirmishes and light troops.
2. From massing an army on one avenue of approach to the movement of army corps on separate avenues.
3. From relatively small and compact armies to large and extended armies which made it impossible for the Commander to observe the entire battlefield during extended operations.

Initiative on the part of subordinates would do more to bring victory on the battlefield than any abstract rules of war or detailed war plans. Training every grade to think and to act for himself is the keynote of this idea. Confidence in the practical and proper initiative of subordinate leaders who have a common education based on an agreement upon fundamental ideas is required. Great freedom of action and initiative is expected in subordinates in allowing them to act decisively in accordance with their own professional judgment.

The Commander by delegating some of his tactical authority to subordinates could take advantage of an opportunity suddenly presented through the initiative of his subordinates. This initiative allowed the subordinate to cope with the unexpected and to even bring it about. The term AUFTRAGSTAKTIK (mission type orders) has been used to express this doctrine--look for ways to exploit chance through initiative.

In order to maximize the advantages of Prussian training in AUFTRAGSTAKTIK, operations must be conducted in fluid, mobile war--not in position warfare or in slow ponderous maneuvers.

German LTG Von Caemmerer writing in 1905 about Von Moltke's method said "the great mobility and the freedom of action which is allowed to subordinate leaders in our army demanded uniformity of thought in the essential points and a uniform training of the mind." He goes on to say that the initiative of the German-Prussian leaders of every grade was one of the main reasons for their great successes in the wars of 1866 and 1870.

C. Historical Example: Theory Becomes Practice.

The next step for the Prussian/German Army was to translate the theoretical concepts of initiative and mobile war into capability. This was done through the medium of the General Staff. The Prussian General Staff was both a vehicle for planning and education. It was this second function that has frequently been overlooked. Trevor Dupuy notes German superiority in ground combat in World War I and World War II in his excellent book "A Genius for War." Dupuy comes very close to the point when he explains that this success was probably due, to a great extent, to German efforts to encourage initiative and imagination in its officers. His Chapter 17 (The Institution of Excellence) touches on this subject when he says, "AUFSTRAGSTAKTIK (mission tactics) was a concept pioneered by Scharnhorst, fostered by his successors, and brought to perfection by Moltke. It was a deliberate creation of the General Staff and is, in fact, very close to the heart of what the General Staff was all about."

SCHARNHORST on Discipline: A willing subordination to the common goal of the combat unit to which one belonged.

MOLTKE on Flexibility: Adherence to a battle plan must not be permitted to stultify the initiative of individual commanders.

SCHLIEFFEN: Decisive mobile strategy negates war by attrition.

It is no coincidence that it was the German army that employed the mobile war concept in World War I (so called infiltration tactics, Vorbeck's guerrilla campaign in East Africa) and World War II (the blitz). This army produced aggressive, self-reliant officers like Von Lettow-Vorbeck, Erich Von Manstein, and Erwin Rommel. The foundation for all of this can be traced through Prussian 19th century military theory, education, and operations.

Only an enlightened progressive education system could translate this concept into capability. This military education system initiated by the Prussian reformers was the principal reason for the success of the German armies in the 19th and 20th centuries. This education system translated theory into practice. Most students

of military history have failed to understand this fact. They have looked to the General Staff concept of detailed preparation and planning as the basis for this success. They have not looked at what produced operational excellence. The idea that in order to function effectively in the uncertain environment of war an officer corps must be trained to exercise initiative and independent judgment.

D. Historical Example: Mobile Warfare and Grand Tactical Excellence.

Napoleon's greatest contribution to the art of war was in the area of grand tactics. He fused marching (maneuver), fighting, and pursuing into one continuous process, i.e., the transition from strategy to tactics. He wedded grand tactics to strategic movement. The area between tactics and strategy usually includes corps, army, and army group operations. This level comprises the art of war as opposed to the art of fighting (tactics). It is at this level that military theory is most significant. The Germans call this the "operativ" level, while the Russians call it the "operational art" (sometimes also known as military strategy). According to Soviet military theorists tactics, operational art, and strategy make up military art. They say that operational art is the connecting link between strategy and tactics; and is called on to work out the theory and practice of preparing and conducting contemporary operations. The Soviet Marshal V.D. Sokolovskiy has this to say on operational art:

Military theory has made use of many decades of experience in developing operations as a completely distinct category having an organized basis. An operation is carried out by one operational formation or group of operational formations such as armies, fronts, etc.

In order to take full advantage of the concept of initiative, it had to be applied at the grand tactical (operational) level as well as at the tactical level. When this is done the result can produce lightning mobile warfare. Aggressive mobile warfare is expressed most clearly at the grand tactical or operational level.

According to US doctrine, the Army conducts war on two levels--strategical and tactical. FM 100-5 Operations states the basic concepts of US Army tactical doctrine. The term "operations" then covers tactical military actions for the US Army. To avoid confusion I have employed the term "grand tactics" instead of the term "operations" used by many foreign armies to represent the level between strategy and tactics.

To what had been essentially two dimensions of military action, strategy and tactics, Napoleon added the grand tactical dimension. The contrast here is that of a two dimensional doctrine versus a three dimensional doctrine. Just as a two dimensional picture does not reflect the highest form of the art, so a two dimensional military doctrine does not reflect the highest form of the art of war. The importance of making a distinction between the levels of military activity is indicated by Baron Von Freytag-Loringhoven in 1920.

In the German Army, then, starting in the general staff, the employment of the term 'strategisch' (strategical) has fallen more and more into disuse. We replace it, as a rule, by the term 'operativ' 'pertaining to operations' and thereby define more simply and clearly the difference from everything that is referred to as 'taktisch' (tactical). All that pertains to operations as such takes place, on the whole, independently of actual combat, whereas in the term 'strategisch' (strategical) things become easily confused, as has been proved by the example of our enemies who are wont to speak of strategical conditions when it is merely a question of purely local matters. At any rate, the term 'strategy' ought to be confined to the most important measures of high command.

Grand tactics in the Napoleonic era comprised the science and art of handling units during the crucial moves when close contact had been established with the enemy. The actual fighting belongs to the realm of tactics. In the 18th century European armies maneuvered strategically to a tactical fight on the battlefield. The beaten army was able to retreat and fight another day. Wars were not resolved in one battle, but involved numerous campaigns. Napoleon's grand tactical maneuver insured the destruction of the enemy army. The corps organization plus his mastery

of the art of war added a new dimension to the conduct of military actions. The corps is the fundamental unit in grand tactical maneuver, divisions become units of execution. The army corps is a unit of definite composition embodying the degree of sufficiency for independent action. The division is restricted to the role of a purely combat unit and is therefore a tactical unit.

At the grand tactical level units are maneuvered and concentrated. At the tactical level fire is moved and concentrated. JFC Fuller made these observations in his book "The Foundations of the Science of War" (1926).

To these folk (average officer), the object in grand tactics is the maximum destruction at the minimum loss, or, more frequently still, at any cost.

Though in minor tactics this is partially true, in grand tactics--it is an error of the first magnitude. The decisive point grand tactically is the will of the enemy's commander.

The grand tactician does not think of physical destruction, but of mental destruction, and when the mind of the enemy's command can only be attacked through the bodies of his men, then from grand tactics we descend to minor tactics, which though related, is a different expression of force.

We see, therefore, that grand tactics is the battle between two plans energized by two wills, and not merely the struggle between two or more military forces. To be a grand tactician, it is essential to understand the purpose of each part of the military instrument.

Grand tactics secures military action by converging all means of waging war towards gaining a decision, i.e., the destruction of the enemy's plan.

Fuller calls Schlieffen's plan for the invasion of France a grand tactical plan.

III. The US Army: Military Theory and Operational Excellence

Some armies have substituted brute force (firepower and mass) for the art of war. This has been successful in the past only when the side employing this tactical doctrine has had a vast superiority in men and material. This doctrine has frequently been called attrition warfare. It divorces firepower from maneuver.

Firepower is expected to do all the damage to the enemy, while the maneuver units simply occupy the ground. This firepower doctrine is not new; it was present in World War I, Korea, and Vietnam. In these past wars, the US Army had a tremendous firepower advantage over the enemy. Artillery, air, and naval fire was able to dominate the battlefield during the day. The US Army also had an equipment advantage over its enemies and frequently a superiority in the number of troops. In the future these advantages of fire, equipment, and numbers superiority may lie with the enemy rather than with the US Army.

If the United States no longer has numerical or material superiority, it needs to develop a doctrine to accommodate increased tempo, as well as loss of numerical and material superiority. General Sharon tells how this can be done when commenting on Israeli shortcomings in the 1973 war when he said "the army had ceased to be brilliant and had substituted blind belief in quantities of steel for military thought, initiative, and intelligence."

A true mobile war of annihilation can only be conducted by an army that fosters and expects initiative at all levels of command. The Army's new edition of FM 100-5 Operations makes this very point in its section of initiative when it says "reward initiative and imagination," and the first quality listed under the US Army's operational concept for modern battle is initiative, yet the reason for the necessity of initiative is not covered. Initiative is required to produce grand tactical excellence in mobile warfare. Grand tactical excellence makes up for numbers. It was at this level that Napoleon and the German army excelled. Traditionally, German and Israeli doctrine has relied on operational superiority in mobile warfare to compensate for enemy numerical superiority. It is at this level that the US Army must excel if we are to fight outnumbered and win. Von Manstein, one of the leading World War I German generals comments on why the German army could fight outnumbered and yet still win.

The WEARMACHT had won such extraordinary successes in the first years of the war by dint of operational (grand tactical) mobility. German military leaders, who by virtue of their education and training, still firmly believed that warfare was an art in which clarity of appreciation and boldness of decisions constituted the essential elements. An art which could find success only in mobile operations. . . .

We must develop a doctrine that reflects the idea that chance and uncertainty are natural to war. This doctrine must be based on the application of the principles of war and the realization that war is the realm of uncertainty, chance, and the unknown. This doctrine must produce an officer corps capable of exercising initiative at all levels, but especially at the grand tactical level. The US Army needs to develop a doctrine that will create operational excellence.

Recommendation

1. Add the grand tactical (operational) level to the levels of military action (between tactics and strategy).
2. Add the AUFTRAGSTAKTIK concept of mission-type orders (take advantage of chance).

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