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FORCIBLE ENTRY - A HARD NUT TO CRACK

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirement of the Operations Department.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract of
FORCIBLE ENTRY - A HARD NUT TO CRACK

Forcible entry today into an opposed theater can be a risky and dangerous mission. U.S. forces have not been called upon to conduct a forcible entry mission since World War II and Korea. Not since World War II have amphibious and airborne forces been used in harmony. Many of the lessons of that era have been forgotten and amphibious and airborne forces have developed along separate service lines.

The capability to crack a really hard nut, like an opposed forcible entry, is questionable today. The weapon systems available to our potential adversaries in this evolving new world order are formidable. Should a future adversary armed with high tech weapons learn from the Gulf War that his best defense is to prevent U.S. forces from obtaining a lodgement, he could be a formidable foe indeed. Only the joint commander with his far-reaching responsibilities for warfighting and budgeting can develop today's capability to the fullest and ensure that tomorrow's forces are capable of defeating future defenses.

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PREFACE

This paper is concerned with the capability of the U.S., as a maritime nation, to project its power from the sea onto foreign shores. It also envisions the most difficult case where no friends or allies will allow basing rights in the theater. As a result only amphibious forces or long-range aircraft will be available for a forcible entry mission. Helicopters will not be available unless they are flying off naval platforms. This will limit the capability of airborne forces and will virtually eliminate air assault forces until an airfield has been established in theater.

While there are other very capable assets available to a joint commander, this paper will only focus on amphibious and airborne forces. Special operations forces demonstrated their value in the Gulf War and would play key roles in a forcible entry capability. However, including them in this paper would expand the scope beyond that desired by the author.

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FORCIBLE ENTRY - A HARD NUT TO CRACK

INTRODUCTION

Forcible entry is not a term that can be found in the Joint Chiefs of Staff Publication (JCS PUB) 1-02 and does not appear in the definition of the two types of operations (amphibious and airborne) associated with it. The Joint Staff Officer Guide calls forcible entry a mission option.¹ Forcible entry may perhaps be best described as a capability available for gaining access to a theater where that access is being denied by an opposing force. As the term implies and as I intend to use it in this paper, it means fighting for a lodgement to gain access to a littoral theater. As a maritime nation, the U.S. has historically projected power over other country's beaches. A forcible entry capability of a large scale has not been called upon since Korea. The changing world order with its potential instability and uncertainty may once again bring about conditions requiring this capability.

Today's unipolar, or more likely multipolar, world has already brought about a more regional focus by policy makers and military leaders in the National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy. These documents foresee the potential for conflict increasing in the future. Conflict will also have greater significance with the proliferation of sophisticated weapons throughout the Third World. This situation could significantly impact on how, as a maritime nation, the United States pursues its long-standing policy of

deterrence through power projection. As we shall see, in a more dangerous world with fewer allies and friends willing to get involved, a forcible entry capability may take on greater significance.

The realization that entry to a theater through force may be required should cause a reevaluation of this capability. Amphibious and airborne forces have long been regarded as those which provide a forcible entry capability.² While these forces have been recognized for their elite capability, they have not kept pace with the modernization of other forces. Forcible entry has not been considered a critical requirement for national security and has therefore been somewhat neglected since World War II and Korea.

The Gulf War should change this perception by providing insights on how future wars will be fought. The lesson that will in all likelihood be learned by our opponents is that they must prevent the U.S. from establishing a lodgement for follow-on forces. Should an opponent choose this option, U.S. forces will be required to fight their way ashore. Our capability today to effect a forcible entry against a determined opponent may be insufficient. That capability can best be improved in the short-run by the synergistic combination of amphibious and airborne assets to produce a rapidly deployable and decisive force capable of forcible entry.

To evaluate the current forcible entry capability, this

paper will look at the history behind forcible entry and how those forces have evolved over the last several decades. The capability of amphibious and airborne forces will then be reviewed and arrayed against the defenses of a well-armed opponent. We will then look at combining those assets to take advantage of their respective strengths to offset weaknesses and increase the nation's forcible entry capability.

HISTORY

In World War II, most Allied amphibious invasions in Europe and some Pacific landings were accompanied by airborne operations.³ Since airborne forces were being employed for the first time, there was some disagreement over how to employ them. During Operation Overlord, the element of risk for both amphibious and airborne forces came into play and determined how the airborne forces would be employed.

The final Allied airborne plan was the product of much debate on both sides of the Atlantic, a compromise between the views of the "all-airborne" school who advocated a deep attack on the clutch of German airfields around Evreux - halfway from the beaches to Paris - and those who believed that widely dispersed airborne landings would create chaos and prevent the Germans from bringing decisive force to bear on the beaches.⁴ Eisenhower chose to concentrate the airborne drops to protect the flanks of the amphibious landings.

He wrote to General Marshall in rejecting the deep airborne plan, ". . . I agree thoroughly with the conception

but disagree with the timing . . . vertical envelopment is sound - but since this type of enveloping force is immobile on the ground, the collaborating force must be strategically and tactically mobile."⁵ He believed that the amphibious forces would lack the striking power, at least initially, to effect a breakout and linkup with the airborne forces. Therefore, he chose to combine the strengths of each operation to reduce the other's inherent weakness.

Both amphibious and airborne operations use shock, surprise, and decisive force to achieve a foothold in enemy territory. At the same time, both are vulnerable to strong counterattacks in the initial stages. Due to their lightness, airborne forces are particularly vulnerable until withdrawn or reinforced through the air or by a linkup on the ground. Eisenhower therefore chose to employ the airborne forces on the flanks of the beaches to protect the amphibious forces from counterattacking Germans while keeping them close enough to effect a linkup without a major breakout from the beach.

General Eisenhower had set the tone for how airborne forces would be used in conjunction with amphibious operations throughout World War II. These roles fell into three categories.⁶ The first involved the use of airborne forces as employed during Overlord to protect the beachhead from counterattack and to facilitate the breakout. The second reinforced a beachhead after it had been seized by an amphibious assault. The final category saw airborne forces

being employed as part of the amphibious assault. This first combined use of airborne and amphibious forces together in World War II has also been the last. Although both forces have been used in the same theater, the close harmonious effort to combine their strengths has not been achieved.

In Korea, the amphibious landing at Inchon was conducted without the use of airborne forces. The 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team did not arrive in Korea until late September 1950, after Inchon.' Two airborne drops were conducted in Korea, both as all-airborne operations in attempts to cut the enemy's escape routes. Korea has been the last of the major amphibious and airborne operations conducted on a large scale.

Small scale operations, such as Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada, have highlighted some of the concerns surrounding the use of amphibious and airborne forces in the same theater. Although amphibious and airborne operations were conducted simultaneously, concern over their ability to operate together caused military planners to separate the island and the forces with a boundary. Neither operation supported the other except in an indirect fashion with the subsequent linkup nearly ending in disaster when communications could not be established between the converging forces. This example shows how little cooperation exists between the two forces today. Additionally it portrays the erosion of the appreciation that existed in World War II for the mutually supporting roles of

these two forces.

The Gulf War did not require a forcible entry capability, since Iraq did not attempt to prevent the arrival of forces in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, airborne operations were conducted on the left flank of the ground phase of the war and amphibious forces were held in the Persian Gulf on the east flank as an operational reserve. Although an amphibious assault into Kuwait was planned, it did not land due to the perceived risk and potential casualties. This was without a doubt the correct decision given the situation. What is of concern though is that apparently the lessons of World War II were not revisited on how to combine the strengths of airborne and amphibious operations. This seems to be another indication of the lack of planning to develop a credible joint forcible entry capability that may continue in spite of the lessons from the Gulf War.

A future adversary may well come to the conclusion that his best course of action when confronting the United States would be to prevent the lodgement that would allow a buildup of forces. The U.S., on the winning side which typically has a difficult time learning lessons from a past war, may conclude that operations can continue as usual and assume that future lodgements will be benign. Or, an equally dangerous conclusion can be reached, that all that is required is amphibious forces to secure the lodgement. Either conclusion will result in no substantial reevaluation of how to best use

all available assets to achieve forcible entry.

While history has shown that forcible entry through amphibious or airborne operations is risky and costly, World War II demonstrated the value of using all available forces to achieve a synergistic effect. The Gulf War showed that forcible entry can fail the feasibility and acceptability tests under certain conditions. The prudent approach would be to evaluate our current capability to conduct a true forcible entry.

CURRENT FORCIBLE ENTRY CAPABILITY

A review of the current forces shows that although some areas have seen improvement, others have not. Amphibious and airborne forces are the responsibility of separate services and do not operate under joint doctrine. Although both have forcible entry capability, neither fits within the others combat specialty; airborne forces do not come from the sea and amphibious forces do not parachute into the theater. Each has developed along separate service lines with little coordination for combining their separate strengths to provide a forcible entry capability. While the Marine Corps has focused on improving delivery to the theater, the Army has looked toward increased combat capability.

The Marine Corps is charged with developing, in coordination with the other Services, the doctrines, procedures, and equipment of naval forces for amphibious operations and the doctrines and procedures for joint

amphibious operations.⁶ The Navy and Marine Corps form a team to conduct amphibious operations with the Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations, JCS PUB 3-02, only superficially discussing the use of Army and Air Force assets.

Amphibious forces remain the storm troops from the sea who seek the advantages of surprise and shock by landing decisive force at the site and time of their choice. Capability has been improved by the use of new infantry weapons, ground mobility, night operations, and helicopters. Assault echelons come ashore by three basic means: amphibious assault vehicle, helicopter, and naval landing craft. With the exception of one recent addition to mobility, all are old in terms of age and even older from a technological standpoint. The amphibious assault vehicle (AAV) was fielded in the early 1970s and has had its service life extended once already. Similarly, the primary troop carrying helicopter, the CH-46, dates from 1958 and requires replacement by the year 2000. Naval landing craft are basically 1950s and 60s technology with the exception of the Landing Craft Air-Cushion (LCAC).

The LCAC was one leg of the triad to form an over-the-horizon (OTH) capability for an amphibious assault. This is not a new concept, but dates from the development of the helicopter after World War II with the first official mention made in 1948 of an OTH requirement.⁷ The intent behind OTH assaults is to avoid detection and the enemy's long range

defenses by increasing his indecision. The other two legs of the triad were the replacement helicopter, the V-22 Osprey, and the replacement for the AAV, the Advanced Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAAV). The V-22 has been canceled by the Secretary of Defense and the AAAV appears to be headed for the growing list of canceled new equipment buys because of its expense. Without this equipment, the assault forces cannot launch an attack from beyond enemy radar range. Without an OTH capability the Marine Corps and Navy will have to conduct a forcible entry operation the old fashioned way, they'll have to earn it.

Earning a forcible entry today may be extremely difficult. Amphibious shipping has never been a high priority for the Navy, as it had to compete with popular carrier and submarine programs. Amphibious lift will fall from 61 ships in fiscal year 1991 to 49 ships by 2000.¹⁰ Naval support, in terms of mine sweeping and naval gunfire support, has seriously eroded from what was available after World War II. The mine sweeping capability of the Navy has fallen to twenty-seven ocean-going ships with considerable neglect until the recent decision to build the Avenger-class ships.¹¹ All the heavy caliber gunfire support ships have been retired from the active Navy. Naval gunfire support will now be done with either five-inch guns or with missiles. The first does not pack sufficient punch to destroy or neutralize coastal defenses while the later is limited in numbers and expensive.

Aviation support is supposed to provide the firepower to fill the gap. However, aircraft face a severe problem from antiair systems, as we shall see later. This lack of naval bombardment and mine clearing could make an amphibious assault very hazardous and perhaps impossible in certain conditions.

Airborne forces have developed over the last forty years with a different focus. The UNAAF charges the Army with developing, in coordination with the other Military Services, the doctrines, procedures, and equipment employed by Army and Marine Corps forces in airborne operations. The Army will have primary responsibility for developing those airborne doctrines, procedures, and equipment that are of common interest to the Army and the Marine Corps.¹² The result is that the Army and Air Force form an independent team for conducting airborne operations similar to the amphibious team.

The 82nd Airborne has remained the only airborne unit since the 101st Airborne Division was converted to the air mobile (now air assault) role in the summer of 1968.¹³ The airborne division is organized for rapid deployment by the Air Force anywhere in the world. It seeks surprise and decisive force by timely arrival on or near the battlefield.¹⁴ The Army has since focused on the combat capability of the 82nd rather than on its delivery to the theater, in contrast with the Marine Corps efforts discussed above. Improvements were made in airborne warfighting capability and local mobility by adding an armored gun system battalion, a truck company, and a

combat aviation brigade.¹⁵ These systems add considerable capability once on the ground, but are limiting in their ability to be air-delivered. The associated helicopters would be limited in a littoral scenario without any close friendly airfields and would have to operate from naval platforms.

There have been no improvements in perhaps the most critical area, which is the initial drop from Air Force aircraft. The paradrop remains the most vulnerable time for airborne forces. Not only are the Air Force aircraft vulnerable, but so are the parachuting infantry men. Suppressive fire is critical just as it is in amphibious operations and from the same sources. An airborne operation in the assault phase finds itself in the same situation as amphibious forces do, having to do it the old fashioned way while facing a vastly improved defensive array of weapons systems.

The independent development of amphibious and airborne forces has not fostered a relationship similar to that which existed at the end of World War II. Each pursues its capability of forced entry to achieve the mission assigned. Rarely do these forces come together to conduct a joint amphibious operation. The only regularly scheduled exercise where both forces participate is Solid Shield, which is a CinCLant sponsored joint operation.¹⁶ This exercise does not really test the forcible entry capability, but merely employs the forces independently with supporting roles of linkup and

sustained operations.

The question that needs answering is whether the U.S. needs a true forcible entry capability against today's potential adversaries, and if so, can it be achieved without combining the amphibious and airborne forces as was done in World War II.

THE NEW WORLD ORDER

A new world order is not a fact;
it is an aspiration - and an
opportunity.

President George Bush

The determination of today's requirements necessitates a critical analysis of the new world order so eloquently espoused by President Bush. The world remains a dangerous place in spite of the demise of the Soviet Union. In many ways, if there is a historical analogy for today's strategic environment, it is less the late 1940s than it is the 1920s.¹⁷ Given this 1920 multipolar perspective, we must realize that this is a troubled world with danger, uncertainty, and instability in many regions. The real threat we now face is the threat of the unknown, the uncertain. The threat is instability and being unprepared to handle a crisis or war that no one predicted or expected.¹⁸

In a bipolar world the U.S. could be assured of having friends and allies because of the nature of the threat from the Soviet Union. That assurance led to assumptions on the availability of bases and support almost anywhere in the

world. We have come to accept as fact that our arrival in a theater will be requested and therefore will occur in a benign environment. Although those assumptions have held till the present, they may no longer be valid. As nations seek to influence their own future, there is potential for conflict of interests between those nations and the United States. In spite of the success of the coalition in the Gulf War, future conflicts of interest could erode this spirit of cooperation. We must remember that each war is unique and the conditions which fostered such unanimous support in the international community may not be present the next time a crisis occurs.

Our unwillingness or inability to see where and when the next aggression will take place assures us that it will be a crisis already in progress and not an event that can be deterred. When that crisis takes place and should we find ourselves with few if any allies in the region, forcible entry may present the only viable military option to eject an aggressor. Far fetched? Perhaps not! Could this not have been the situation if Iraq had overrun Saudi Arabia before U.S. forces deployed? The Arab countries from Egypt to Yemen to Turkey may have been afraid to offend Iraq. Without access through them, we would have had to rely on an air campaign or had to conduct a forcible entry. This scenario presents some serious challenges when one considers the proliferation of technically sophisticated weapons systems.

THE THREAT

Many Third World countries possess tremendous capability in terms of modern weapons systems acquired. Those arsenals will only become more capable and modern as the flood of technology transfer continues with the booming international arms industry. A country with sophisticated weapons systems could pose a serious threat to a forced entry. The most serious threat would come from antiship cruise missiles, an integrated air defense, naval mines, and armored forces.

The number of navies armed with antiship cruise missiles is expanding and the number and sophistication of those missiles are increasing. "Forty-eight nations have cruise missiles, with 2,000 Exocets and 10,000 Styx missiles in their inventories," Admiral Leon Edney, Vice Chief of Naval Operations, estimated last year.¹⁹ An estimate this year puts the number at seventy states possessing sea and land-launched antiship cruise missiles.²⁰ While these and other missiles are formidable, successors are already on the drawing boards that will achieve speeds of Mach 2 and a range of 100 nautical miles.²¹ Before an amphibious task force can be put at risk, these land and sea based missiles will have to be negated, which may in itself be a difficult task.

Our primary means of attacking these antiship missiles will be by air, but they may well be protected by sophisticated and formidable integrated air defense systems. Although Iraq's air defense system did not seriously challenge the coalition's air supremacy, the Egyptian example of the Yom

Kippur War showed that an integrated air defense umbrella can be almost impenetrable. With the lessons of the Gulf War available and tremendous systems on the market, many countries will be able to develop a defense that may challenge even American air superiority.

Naval mines present yet another hurdle to be overcome after control of the sea and air has been achieved. Mines are an effective and cheap way of denying use of the sea and beaches. Excluding the U.S. and the Confederation of Independent States, forty-five states currently are credited with sea-mining capabilities ranging from good to poor. At least twenty-three countries are known to be capable of producing mines.²² There are a vast number of mines already in the arsenals that are still effective. In the Gulf War for example, the minesweeping effort neutralized more than 1,300 mines that Iraq had laid to impede the approach of naval forces to the Kuwaiti coast.²³

Not only will superiority at sea and in the air be at risk, but superiority on the ground will be challenged as well. Tanks and armored personnel carriers are present around the world in vast numbers. As an example, Iraq had between 4,500 and 5,000 tanks. These numbers will become even more significant as modern systems become available on the open market and the numbers of tanks in the U.S. inventory shrink. Armored forces present the most formidable counterattack threat to both airborne and amphibious operations and

challenge our ability to hold a lodgement.

These formidable forces arrayed in depth and in mutual support on the sea and extended inland can seriously jeopardize a forcible entry. A determined defense using modern weapons systems to prevent the establishment of a lodgement could have considerable success against today's amphibious or airborne operation. Such a defense can only be overcome today by the combined effect of all assets available to a joint commander.

JOINT FORCIBLE ENTRY

Crisis response remains one of the foundations of the national military strategy. Much of the responsibility to assess the regional threat and uncertainty and implement the national military strategy to achieve national interests and goals rests on the shoulders of the joint commanders. To them will fall the task of developing adaptive plans that can respond to the spectrum of warfare. Joint commanders must be able to respond to an aggressor who has learned the lessons of the Gulf War. It is they who will have to bring together the separate training, doctrine, and equipment of the amphibious and airborne forces to provide a truly viable forcible entry capability.

The capability of the Armed Forces for forcible entry is an important weapon in the arsenal of the joint force commander. The primary modes for such entry are amphibious, airborne, and air assault operations, which provide joint force commanders with great potential to achieve strategic and operational leverage. As shown in the Gulf War, even the threat of a powerful and flexible forcible

entry capability can exert a compelling influence upon the plans and operations of an opponent."

Combining the organic capabilities of amphibious and airborne forces can produce effects such as were seen in the successful operations of World War II. The situation will dictate whether forces are employed simultaneously or sequentially, but in either case they must support each other in accomplishing their joint mission of forcible entry. This approach fits well with the concepts of maneuver warfare and air-land battle which seek to avoid enemy strengths. That means preventing the early disclosure of where the operations will take place so that the enemy must defend everywhere or conduct a mobile defense. In either case he will be weakened. As Sun Tzu said, "He who prepares everywhere will be weak everywhere." Similarly, a mobile defense to hedge against uncertainty forgoes many of the advantages of a prepared defense. Those weaknesses can then be attacked with the strengths of the amphibious and airborne forces and their supporting arms.

Intelligence must disclose those enemy vulnerabilities. The use of intelligence will be even more critical than it has been in the past. The lethality of today's weapons systems means they must be avoided or negated, if not destroyed. Once the critical vulnerabilities of the enemy weapons systems have been identified, they can be attacked or jammed. The new generation weapons of antiship missiles and an integrated air defense must be dealt with by air forces or land attack

missiles to allow for a lodgement to take place. Formidable enemy defenses, such as mines and armored counterattack forces, must be avoided. Without an OTH capability today, amphibious forces must have a level playing field before entering the amphibious operations area. The Navy will not risk its limited amphibious ships any more than the Marines will want to jeopardize its smaller forces. The same dilemma faces the airborne forces and the Air Force's aircraft.

Once the high tech defense of the beach area has been destroyed or negated, the amphibious and airborne forces can begin their assaults to seize the lodgement. Through the use of speed, surprise, and decisive force at the point of attack, each can be used against a variety of targets to disrupt the coastal defense. The amphibious forces bring sea and air delivered mass and heavy weapons to overpower the defense. Airborne forces will bring additional mass and another deeper means of entering the theater. Airborne forces will greatly complicate the defensive planing of any opponent by widening his area of concern. Additionally, with their superb antiarmor capability, they can protect the amphibious forces from counterattack. With flank protection, amphibious forces can more readily achieve a linkup with the airborne forces to provide sustainment and secure the lodgement objectives. Jointly, they can maximize their strengths and minimize weaknesses.

CONCLUSIONS

The joint commander will have to develop the adaptive plans and exercises to provide this capability for forcible entry. The plans and exercises must build an ability using today's forces to defeat an enemy determined to meet us at or beyond the water line with an array of high tech weapons.

Only the joint commander can bring the services together to work on developing an improved capability for forcible entry built on the model of mutual support seen in World War II. This capability must be planned for now and in the future. The joint commander, with his warfighting and budgeting responsibilities, can influence present planning and future capabilities. Only with the unified commanders support will an OTH capability come to fruition to defeat the long-range high tech weapons of the future. The Gulf War undoubtedly demonstrated to potential adversaries the value of denying a lodgement from firmly establishing itself. Every asset available must be used to complement the others, not the least of which are amphibious and airborne forces. In most cases it will be necessary to create a littoral lodgement with a Littoral Shield - on land, in the air, at sea, under the sea, and in space - to protect the arrival and offloading of ships and aircraft.²⁵

ENDNOTES

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2. Air assault forces are sometimes given credit for a forcible entry capability. This is true when that entry can be supported from bases within helicopter range. Without those bases and with a requirement to enter a theater by amphibious means, air assault forces are not going to be available until after the lodgement is established.
3. Theodore L. Gatchel, "Hang Together, or Hang Separately," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, November 1990, p. 56.
4. Michael Hickey, Out of the Sky: A History of Airborne Warfare. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1979), p. 112.
5. Ibid.
6. These categories are borrowed from Colonel Gatchel's article referenced above. In "Hang Together, or Hang Separately" he explains these categories in some detail, with examples.
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23. Ibid., p. 70.
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