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TITLE: GENERAL RAYMOND DAVIS AND THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR

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Abstract
The principles of War provide an Operational Framework that can assist the Commander in planning combat operations. This paper demonstrates how Major General Davis, as the Commander of the 3rd Marine Division in Vietnam, skillfully applied the proper principles of War in Combat operations to achieve success over the enemy. Prior to General Davis taking command in the spring of 1968, the Third Marine Division found themselves tied down in fixed positions along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Vietnam. The Division's offensive actions were extremely limited as they were tasked to focus their main effort on building and manning a defensive barrier system along the DMZ. The Marines had all but lost their offensive spirit with General Davis assumed command. General Davis' aggressive utilization of the principles of war proved instrumental in rejuvenating the morale of his division and created a tactical advantage over enemy forces which he skillfully exploited to ensure success on the battlefield. His application of Air Mobile tactics through combined armed units gave his division the tactical advantage needed to defeat NVA Forces with the Quang TRI Province.

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THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR PROVIDE AN OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK THAT CAN ASSIST THE COMMANDER IN PLANNING COMBAT OPERATIONS. THIS PAPER DEMONSTRATES HOW MAJOR GENERAL DAVIS, AS THE COMMANDER OF THE 3RD MARINE DIVISION IN VIETNAM, SKILLFULLY APPLIED THE PROPER PRINCIPLES OF WAR IN COMBAT OPERATIONS TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS OVER THE ENEMY. PRIOR TO GENERAL DAVIS TAKING COMMAND IN THE SPRING OF 1968, THE THIRD MARINE DIVISION FOUND THEMSELVES TIED DOWN IN FIXED POSITIONS ALONG THE DEMILITARIZED ZONE (DMZ) BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM. THE DIVISION'S OFFENSIVE ACTIONS WERE EXTREMELY LIMITED AS THEY WERE TASKED TO FOCUS THEIR MAIN EFFORT ON BUILDING AND MANNING A DEFENSIVE BARRIER SYSTEM ALONG THE DMZ. THE MARINES HAD ALL BUT LOST THEIR OFFENSIVE SPIRIT WHEN GENERAL DAVIS ASSUMED COMMAND. GENERAL DAVIS' AGGRESSIVE UTILIZATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR PROVED INSTRUMENTAL IN REJUVENATING THE MORALE OF HIS DIVISION AND CREATED A TACTICAL ADVANTAGE OVER ENEMY FORCES WHICH HE SKILLFULLY EXPLOITED TO ENSURE SUCCESS ON THE BATTLEFIELD. HIS APPLICATION OF AIR MOBILE TACTICS THROUGH COMBINED ARMED UNITS GAVE HIS DIVISION THE TACTICAL ADVANTACE NEEDED TO DEFEAT NVA FORCES WITH THE QUANG TRI PROVINCE.

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Executive Summary

Title: General Davis and the Principles of War

Author: LtCol A. T. Conord

Thesis: This paper examines the leadership qualities of Major General Davis during his command of the Third Marine Division in Vietnam. It demonstrates how General Davis' skillful application of the Principles of War provided a framework that was instrumental to the success of his unit during combat operations.

Discussion: History has proven that there has never been a simple formula that guaranteed success on the battlefield, but the basic principles of war can be traced back over 2000 years and are still relevant on the modern battlefield. These principles provide an operational framework that can assist the commander in planning combat operations. Major General Davis exemplified what the ancient military philosopher, Sun Tzu, described as a skilled commander, who could assess priorities and degree of risk involved and correctly apply the proper principles of war in a given situation.[1]

Prior to General Davis taking command of the Third Marine Division in the spring of 1968, the unit found themselves tied down in fixed positions along the demilitarized zone (DMZ) between North and South Vietnam. The division's offensive ability was extremely limited as they were pressured to focus their main effort on building and manning a defensive barrier system along the DMZ. The Marines had all but lost their offensive spirit when General Davis assumed command. The aggressive utilization of the

[1] Samuel B. Griffith, *Sun Tzu: The Art of War.* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1963, 43.

principles of war by General Davis rejuvenated the morale of his division and created a tactical advantage that overwhelmed the enemy forces.

Conclusion: This paper concludes that the skillful application of the principles of war by General Davis was instrumental to his operational success on the battlefield. His utilization of maneuver warfare through air mobile tactics and combined arms task forces regained the offensive initiative which enabled his division to defeat North Vietnamese divisions operating within the Northern I Corps sector.

GENERAL RAYMOND DAVIS AND THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR

INTRODUCTION

The summer of 1968 found US forces at their peak in South East Asia while America's public opinion of the Vietnam War was plummeting. President Lyndon B. Johnson's leadership was buckling under the pressure, and he confirmed his loss of stomach for such a war as he renounced his candidacy for the upcoming election.[1] As Johnson was simultaneously halting the bombings in North Vietnam and offering negotiations to Hanoi, desperate for some type of peace agreement, Major General Raymond Davis was accepting command of the battle hardened but weary 3rd Marine Division. His inspiration and progressive tactical thinking rejuvenated his Division and gave them the advantage they needed to defeat numerous North Vietnamese Divisions within the I Corps Tactical Zone (See Map 1). Davis' sound leadership and disciplined use of the principles of war sparked a fire within in his Marines and were key to his success on the battlefield.

HYPOTHESIS

The Principles of War have provided a solid framework for success in combat operations for many centuries. This paper will show how Major General Davis' skillful application of the following principles, Unity of Command, Objective, Offensive, Maneuver, Mass, Economy of Force, Security, Surprise, and Simplicity facilitated his operational successes over North Vietnamese forces as a Division Commander in Vietnam.

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[1] Henery A. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*. (New York: Simon and Schuster Publishing, 1994), 627.

THE VIETNAM WAR AND ITS BEGINNINGS

After the end of the Second World War, it was assumed that the overlaying national objective of the Soviet Union was the expansion of communism. In order to counter this strategy, President Truman developed "a policy of firm containment, designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counter-force at every point where they showed signs of encroaching upon the interest of a peaceful and stable world."[2]

In May of 1950, under relentless attacks from the Republican Party for allowing the uncontested Communist takeover of China, President Truman sanctioned the initial US involvement in Indochina. Fearing political retribution and desiring to uphold the administration's Containment policy, he allocated the first ten million dollars in military aid to the French Army fighting communist aggression in Indochina.[3]

In conjunction with the containment policy, the National Security Council, during the administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower, accepted another concept known as the Domino Theory. Largely based on the fear of Communist Chinese aggression it predicted that if Indochina fell to communism, Burma and Thailand would soon follow and the threat of a communist foothold in India, Europe, portions of the Middle East and even Japan would become a serious concern.[4] The primary flaw with this theory was that it was based on misperceptions of China's national objectives and offered no analysis on why this collapse would be so automatic or wide spread. During 1965, the Chinese Defense Minister, Lin Piao, and the Chinese Communist Party Chairman, Mao Tse-tung, both stressed that their country had no intentions of introducing military forces in Vietnam unless directly attacked by the

[2] Kissinger, 454.
[3] Allan R Millett, *A Short History of the Vietnam War.* (Indiana University Press), 1978, 46.
[4] Kissinger, 627.

United States. Much of Mao's motivation was to conserve his army for political adversaries within China, which he attacked in the winter of 1965.[5]

Hope of having the French fend off communist aggression started to unravel as the North Vietnamese crippled the French Army at the battle of Dienbienphu in 1954. Compounded by their heavy losses during WWI and WWII, the French Government was emotionally drained and frustrated with their inability to maintain control over Indochina led to French withdrawal from Vietnam in April of 1956. Although it was practical for the US to have France supply the combat forces to fight the expansion of communism, it was difficult for the US to support the French in Indochina, since their motive was re-establishment of colonial rule.[6] The US impatiently awaited French withdrawal, but was unprepared for the serious military and political vacuum created by this departure.[7] For the next ten years, the United States would continue to escalate both economic and political support as well as introducing diplomatic and military advisers in hopes of establishing a legitimate democratic regime within South Vietnam.

In June of 1954, Ngo Dinh Diem, the son of an imperial court official, became the ruler of South Vietnam and the American administration's new hope for a strong, unified South Vietnam that would defeat the Communist guerrillas without risking American lives. However, close examination of social and cultural factors in Vietnam would have shown that the hope of Diem pulling the country together was illusory. Diem's elitist background made it difficult for him to relate to the majority of his country. Mixing South Vietnam's Confucian

[5] Millett, 115-116.
[6] Kissinger, 625.
[7] Bruce Palmer, *The 25 – Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam.* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 7.

tradition and the democratic style regime the US was trying to establish proved a poor formula for success.[8] Naive enthusiasm in the Eisenhower administration compelled it to,

> "hurl itself headlong into the defense of South Vietnam against communist aggression and the task of nation-building in the name of enabling a society whose culture was vastly different from America's to maintain it's newfound independence and to practice freedom in the American sense."[9]

Increased pressure from communist insurgents against a war weary people and the cultural conflicts inherent to the newly established democratic regime were major factors that contributed to the failure of this strategy.

In early 1961, President John F. Kennedy's Administration focused its attention on the threat of nuclear war from the Soviet Union and China. To counter this Kennedy formulated strategy called Flexible Response. He stated that our posture, "must be both flexible and determined. Any potential aggressor contemplating an attack on any part of the free world with any kind of weapon, conventional or nuclear, must know that our response will be suitable, selective, swift, and effective."[10] This strategy called for a metered response within a ladder of escalation depending on the political or military situation. During Vietnam, the Flexible Response strategy gave the civilian leadership a process by which to determine an appropriate course of action applicable to the political situation.

US relations with Diem began to deteriorate, and by 1963, the Kennedy Administration grew frustrated with Diem's inability to institute serious political and economic reforms in South Vietnam. This instability, coupled with Diem's blatant repression of Buddhism and suspicions that he was considering a secret compromise with Hanoi, lead Kennedy to authorize his overthrow.[11]

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[8] Kissinger, 638.
[9] Kissinger, 638.
[10] Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War.* (Indiana University Press, 1977), 445.
[11] Steven E. Ambrose. *Rise to Globalism*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 197.

In November of 1963, with CIA acknowledgement, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) overthrew and executed Diem along with his brother. US hopes that Diem's removal would provoke popular support of the newly established military government backfired. The sudden vacuum in leadership seemed only to encourage the communist guerilla forces to increase their infiltration of the south.[12] Through 1964 their attacks increased in intensity to the point that in early 1965, they were on the verge of cutting South Vietnam in half at the narrowest part isolating Saigon from the rest of the country. In condoning the overthrow of Diem, the US had cemented its involvement in Vietnam, and the political instability that resulted proved to be the catalyst that ultimately forced full scale US military involvement in 1965.[13]

Throughout 1964, the Johnson administration, following the assassination of President Kennedy, continued to believe it could accomplish a victory in Vietnam with limited engagement of U.S. forces. Johnson was strongly advised by his inherited administration to remain engaged in Vietnam and not back out. Being extremely unsure of himself concerning foreign policy, his lack of credibility forced him to endorse Kennedy's policy of engagement.[14] As guerilla efforts escalated and the North Vietnamese began introducing regular army units into the south, Johnson edged America toward greater involvement. An alleged attack on the US destroyer U.S.S. Maddox in 1964 gave Johnson the justification he needed to launch a retaliatory air strike against North Vietnam. In 1965, after the attack on the American adviser's barracks in Qui Nhon, a bombing campaign code named "Rolling Thunder" began. Five months later, US combat units were committed to the war, and by 1969, forces in Vietnam reached 543,000.[15]

[12] Ambrose, 197.
[13] Kissinger, 655.
[14] Kissinger, 657.
[15] Kissinger, 658.

When the Marines landed on Vietnam in 1965, the nature of their mission was defensive. The Joint Chiefs of Staff direction for the initial ground forces, which were two battalions of the 9th MEB, was not to commit to "… day to day actions against the Viet Cong."[16] Thus, from the earliest involvement in country, Marine forces at the tactical level experienced constraints. They were there as an enabler for the ARVN forces, who were to conduct the preponderance of the fighting. Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, further expanded this defensive posture by establishing what was called the "McNamara Line." This required the Marines to man strong points across the DMZ and included an expensive sensor system that was to detect enemy guerrilla movement (See Map 2). It was designed to stop small guerilla sized units, but the Marines found themselves up against division size forces requiring a number of Marine maneuver units to be "tied down" to fixed positions to increase.[17]

In April of 1968, North Vietnam commenced the TET Offensive. The primary objective was to create a general uprising and the defection of major elements of the ARVN. In addition, the North was hoping to secure a decisive victory over the US, as it had against the French at Dien Bien Phu to erode America's will to fight.[18] Although this operation failed to meet its objectives, the attack on Khe Sanh, a Marine combat base in the western highlands of northern I Corps, had a significant impact. Although the Marines incurred many casualties, the heroic actions of the 3rd Marine Division denied the enemy access to strategic corridors into Northern I Corps positions. However, the weary Marines were still tied to their heavily defended combat bases and the offensive spirit in the 3rd Marine Division began to fade.[19] During this same period, the US was undergoing intense challenges at home with an immerging drug

[16] Edward F. Murphy, *"Semper Fi—Vietnam: From Da Nang to the DMZ"; Marine Corps Campaigns, 1965-1975*. (California: Presidio Press, 1997), 8.
[17] Raymond G. Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*. (North Carolina: Research Triangle Publishing, 1995), 195.
[18] Moyers S. Shore, *The Battle For Khe Sanh*. (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch HQMC, 1969), vi.
[19] Richard D. Camp, "Taking Command: A Lesson in Leadership," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (June 1999), 77.

culture, rejection of authority, and a new permissiveness that permeated American culture. These attitudes compounded with the fact that US troops were being vilified by the press, on college campuses and churches for fighting an immoral war began to take a serious toll.[20] As the 3rd Marine Division morale dropped to a new low due to the unproductive defensive posture, Major General Raymond C. Davis took command of the division on 22 May 1968.[21]

BIOGRAPHY

By this point, troops fighting in Vietnam had grown despondent over plunging public opinion and political incompetence. Military leaders now faced a serious challenge to preserve the level of motivation necessary to maintain an effective fighting force.[22] Raymond G. Davis had been preparing for this kind of challenge all his life.

He was born in Fitzgerald, Georgia on January 13, 1915. The combination of his early achievements in academics, athletics, and outdoor activities served him well in his development as a Marine officer.[23] In 1933, he graduated from Atlantic Technical High School and was a member on the National Honor Society, the varsity wrestling team, cross-country team, and the Army Reserve Officers Training Corps (AROTC) drill team. During his senior year, he also became interested in weight lifting and continued to "pump iron" beyond his college years. The strength and endurance he gained from lifting weights and the agility he developed from wrestling physically prepared him for a carrier as a Marine Infantrymen.[24]

Davis worked his way through college during the Great Depression earning a Bachelor of Science with honors in Chemical Engineering from Georgia Tech. Achieving the honor roll

[20] Palmer, 83.
[21] Camp, 77.
[22] Millett, 6-7.
[23] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 23.
[24] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 24.

each year and serving on numerous school associations demonstrating his strong work ethic and commitment to excellence. His positive experience in the Army ROTC and his respect for his military instructors were influential in his seeking a regular commission which he ultimately received from the United States Marine Corps upon his graduation from college.[25]

In June of 1938, Lieutenant Davis reported into The Basic School (TBS) at the Philadelphia Naval Yard. It was here that he established friendships that would impact his entire career in the Corps. One of the closest he would form was with one of the six aviation cadets in the class, Gregory "Pappy" Boyington, who became the greatest ace in Marine Corps history and a fellow Medal of Honor winner.[26] However, it was Davis' company commander, Captain Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller, who made the greatest impression on the young lieutenant and influenced his career throughout the next thirty years. Captain Lewis "Chesty" Puller, one of the most famous officers in Corps, was a demanding leader, but the experience and skills he imparted to the young lieutenants, especially Davis, was remarkable. Their friendship and mutual respect would grow over the years and their paths would cross many times. Some early advice he received from Puller was, "It's been years since we've had a war. Might be years before another, so you are being judged in your peacetime roles – perfection in drill, in dress, in bearing, in demeanor, shooting and self improvement. But more than anything else, in the performance of your Marines."[27] This truth became a key leadership principle throughout Davis' career as he quickly learned that any success he would have in the Marine Corps would be directly attributed to his ability to motivate and lead the Marines with whom he served.[28]

Upon completion of TBS, Lieutenant Davis reported for his first sea duty as part of a Marine Detachment aboard the USS Portland and was assigned to the anti-aircraft battery. It

[25] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 25.
[26] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 30.
[27] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 38.
[28] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 38.

was here that he was exposed to the leadership of the detachment's First Sergeant, who taught him the invaluable lessons of non-commissioned officer leadership. Davis learned that to become an effective leader he must learn everything he could about his troops so he could efficiently use their strengths and weaknesses to build a cohesive unit.[29]

Several years later, during a chance meeting with Chesty Puller, he was encouraged to request duty with the newly formed 1st Marine Division, because "this will assure positive offensive action against the enemy."[30] In February of 1941, he received his orders to the 1st Marine Division at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and was assigned to the 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery. His unit returned to the United States in April of that year and spent time on Parris Island, South Carolina and Quantico, Virginia; finally settling at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. While stationed at Camp Lejeune, Ray Davis attained the ranks of both First Lieutenant and Captain and in 1942, was married to a local school teacher from North Carolina named Willa Knox Heafner. Soon after his marriage, Captain Davis left his pregnant wife for the Pacific and the "canal."[31]

Sailing with the 1st Marine Division from California in July of 1942, Captain Davis was soon to see his first combat experience landing an hour after the first wave hit the beaches of Guadalcanal. His primary mission was anti-aircraft defense of the captured Japanese airfield known as Henderson Field. He also participated in the Eastern New Guinea and Cape Gloucester campaigns prior to moving on to Australia to prepare for the next mission. Chesty Puller, the new Commanding Officer for the 1st Marines, requested Davis to become one of his battalion commanders. Having always been drawn to the infantry and the cohesion such units enjoyed, Major Davis eagerly took command of the 1st Battalion 1st Marines. Once again

[29] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 36.
[30] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 40.
[31] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 43-51.

Chesty Puller was a key influence to Davis' career;[32] "he was my TBS tactics instructor, company commander, mentor during sea duty, school director and now my first regimental commander."[33]

In April of 1944, Major Davis and the 1st Marines departed to engage in one of the bloodiest battles in Marine Corps history, Peleliu. During the battle, Major Davis was awarded the Navy Cross and the Purple Heart for extraordinary heroism. Although wounded during the initial landing, he refused to be evacuated and continued to lead his Marines on a beachhead that was threatened with being overrun. During the fight for Peleliu Davis put his extensive knowledge of weapons to good use. As he put it,

> "All those hours and days and weeks and months spent in learning and working with firing supporting arms paid off immediately. I knew artillery and Naval gunfire capabilities and limitations from instruction in Basic School, sea duty on the USS Portland, and the weapons course at Quantico…..I also was well-instructed and experienced in antiaircraft and antitank weapons in the same manner, plus my combat experience from Guadlacanal and Cape Gloucester."[34]

The use of supporting arms became a recurring theme of Davis' leadership. His subordinates plainly knew that they were expected to use any and all means of fire support against the enemy before risking a Marine's life![35] After three years in the Pacific, Davis finally headed home to reunite with his wife and son Gilbert, whom he had never seen.[36]

He was assigned to the Marine Air Infantry School, Quantico as Chief of the Infantry Section. It was during this tour that he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and the Davis' had their second son, Miles. In 1947 after two years at Quantico, LtCol Davis moved to Guam and his family followed a year later. He was assigned the billet of G-3 (plans, operations and

[32] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 52-62.
[33] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 62.
[34] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 68.
[35] Camp, 83.
[36] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 69-73.

training) Officer of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade and was instrumental in developing a new training area on the island.[37]

The fall of 1949 LtCol Davis returned from Guam and was assigned as the Marine Corps Inspector Instructor with the 9th Marine Corps Reserve Infantry Battalion, Chicago, Illinois. He served in this position until August of 1950 when the unit was activated and sent to Korea. LtCol Davis was then directed to Camp Pendleton, California where he was assigned as the commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines. After just 5 days of training with the battalion, Davis' unit embarked, leaving his wife pregnant with their third child, a daughter. Eighteen days later, 1/7 made an amphibious landing at Inchon, Korea as the regimental reserve. Shortly there after, the battalion was reembarked and landed on the east coast of Korea. Attacking northward, 1/7 lead the assault and was positioned just northwest of the Chosin when Communist Chinese crossed the Yalu River and entered the conflict. In the ensuing confusion, LtCol Davis had a company surrounded at the Toktong Pass, a decisive point along the main route leading south. The outnumbered Marines were in a dire state and the company commander was shot through the mouth as he spoke to Davis on the radio. With little time and the weather so cold he remembered his mind wanting to shut down, Davis had to come up with a plan to rescue his Marines. He courageously led the battalion on a seemingly impossible mission of moving through six Chinese divisions. His battalion encountered strong enemy opposition while attacking up steep ice-covered slopes as he personally lead the attacks in the face of overwhelming fire in hand-to-hand encounters as they drove hostile troops from their entrenched positions. Using well-timed artillery screens and courageous tactics, Davis was able to break through and link up with the surrounded company at Toktong Pass. It was this rescue of Fox Company, 7th Marines that would earn LtCol Davis the Medal of Honor.

[37] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 75-86.

During the Korean War he also received two Silver Star Medals for gallant combat leadership that exposed him to heavy enemy fire, the Legion of Merit, and the Bronze Star with the Combat "V".[38]

In May of 1951, LtCol Davis left the Korean peninsula and reported for duty as the G-3 at Headquarters Marine Corps. For the next eight years he would serve in the Washington area in numerous billets to include tours at the Command and Staff and National War Colleges, Assistant Director at the Command and Staff College, and as part of the Intelligence Branch, Headquarters, Marine Corps. In July of 1960, Colonel Davis was assigned as the Chief of the Intelligence Analysis Branch for the European Command in Paris, France.[39]

Following his tour in Europe, Colonel Davis was selected to be a General officer, and returned to the Far East in 1963 as the Assistant Division Commander of the 3rd Marine Division Okinawa, Japan. He also had additional duties as the Commanding General of both the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) Expeditionary Brigade, Philippines and the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) responsible for the China Sea Contingency Operations. As the situation in Vietnam worsened, his staff was responsible for expanding the airfield at Danang and preparing beach studies, which would be used the following year when the 3rd Marine Division conducted an amphibious landing on Vietnam in 1965.[40]

Brigadier General Davis returned to Headquarters Marine Corps in 1965, to serve as the Assistant Director of Personnel and then as the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1 until March of 1968 when the newly promoted Major General Davis found himself enroute to his third war, this one in Vietnam. He began his tour as the Deputy Commander of the Provisional Corps in the Northern I Corps area just south of the DMZ. His tour with the Provisional Corps which

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[38] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 97-130.
[39] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 135-173.
[40] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 175-178.

lasted only a few months, but it was here he learned the value of the principle of superior mobility as he observed the combat success the 1st Air Cavalry Division and the 101st Airborne Division using airmobile offensive tactics. Davis commented that,

> "They had the best material support, a full allowance of helicopters, the best commanders. And Rosson pushed them, pressured them, and kept them out after the enemy. That was the key. I could feel that Rossen was concerned about the mobility of the Marines in the Quang Tri Province….So when the army moved into Operation Pegasus to relieve the Khe Sanh operation, they applied forces directly responsive to the enemy's disposition and forgot about real estate -- forgetting about bases, going after the enemy in key areas -- this punished the enemy most. Pegasus demonstrated the complete decisiveness of high mobility operations."[41]

On the 22nd of May, 1968 Major General Davis took command of the 3rd Marine Division from MGen General Rathvon Tompkins. Immediately after the change of command, Davis gathered his commanders and principle staff. His guidance was straight forward. From this point on, "high mobility" would be the guiding principle on which the division would operate.[42] Davis' previous combat experience and ability to utilize the Principles of War would give his Marines the advantage they needed to defeat the enemy.

PRINCIPLES OF WAR

History has shown that there has never been a simple formula that guaranteed success on the battlefield, but there are basic principles of war that can be traced back over 2000 years to a Chinese General named Sun Tzu. Although the majority of military historians acknowledge Sun Tzu as the first to describe what we now call principles of war, other theorist such as Carl Von Clausewitz and Antoine Jomini also evaluated these in the eighteenth century. The basic principles are still relevant concepts for the military forces of the twenty-first century, and

[41] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 190-192.
[42] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 194

provide an operational framework that can assist the commander in planning combat actions. These principles are all interrelated elements of warfare. They are not separate and distinct entities and must be mutually considered even though not all principles may be applicable in every situation.[43] Sun Tzu stated that the true art of war is the ability of a skilled commander to correctly assess the priorities and the degree of risk involved and correctly apply the proper principles of war in a given situation. [44] In the book, *A History of Warfare*, Field Marshal Montgomery stated that,

> "By studying the actions and methods of some of the great captains of the past we can learn how the practical side of war was handled in their day. Such study will illustrate the evolution of the art of war but also the uniformity of its basic conceptions. It will show the student that the same principles of war that were employed in the past appear again and again throughout history, only in different circumstances. Although weapons have become more powerful and the problems of the battlefield have grown more intricate and more complex, nonetheless the art of war is fundamentally the same today as it was in the days of ancient Greece, or when Rome and Carthage joined in battle."[45]

To be skillful in the art of war is a continuous process that incorporates education and experience. Looking back over Major General Davis' life, both played a role. Having graduated from both the Command and Staff and National War College he had the advantage of studying the art of war at the strategic and operational levels. This, with combat experience gained early in his career, made him the optimal leader in Vietnam.

The Principles of War provide a good framework to study the effectiveness of combat leaders during military operations. The remainder of this paper will attempt to substantiate that MGen Davis' application of the following principles contributed to his operational success as a Division Commander in Vietnam: Unity of Command, Objective, Offensive, Maneuver, Mass, Economy of Force, Security, Surprise, Simplicity.

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[43] J.F. Schmitt, *Ground Combat Operations (OH 6-1)*. (Quantico Va: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 1988), 2-1.
[44] Evans, David. *War: A Matter of Principle*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1997), 1.
[45] Evans, 2.

UNITY OF COMMAND

This principle is a foundation on which a unit must be established and is essential in the employment of forces to achieve decisive application of combat power. Unity of command requires coordination through cooperation of all employed forces toward a common goal. It unites all assigned forces, regardless of the level, under one responsible commander who has the authority to direct his force in pursuit of a unified objective.[46] Once this commander communicates his intent and provides guidance, he enables subordinate commanders to make timely, critical decisions in order to prosecute the mission. As success in combat becomes reality, a unit establishes a sense of purpose which creates high unit cohesion and morale, both of which will contribute to the responsiveness and flexibility needed of each individual in combat.[47] Napoleon summed up the importance of unity of command in his book, *Maxims of War*, when he said, "nothing is so important in war as an undivided command."[48] On the subject of morale, Field Marshal Montgomery also commented that "…. the greatest single factor making for success, is the spirit of the warrior. The best way to achieve a high morale in wartime is by success in battle.[49]

Davis

Immediately upon Major General Davis assuming command of the 3rd Marine Division he confronted several challenges that had been negatively affecting unity, integrity, and morale within his division over the previous year. By spring of 1968, the majority of Davis' 3rd Marine Division found themselves spread out across the Quang Tri Province, south of the DMZ . This area was bordered by the South China Sea on the East, the Laos border on the

[46] Schmitt, 2-3.
[47] Evans, 111.
[48] Schmitt, 2-3.
[49] Evans, 22.

west and incorporated a series of defensive strong points, referred to as the "McNamara Line," which were supported by a series of combat bases, of which Khe Sanh was the furthest anchor point to the west.[50] The Marines were reluctant to hold the "McNamara Line" because of the defensive posture. The ordered reinforcement of the Khe Sanh combat base, not only increased frustration within the division, but added the requirement for additional fixed ground forces. This led to a shortage in forces available to conduct effective offensive operations and created a situation where the battalions were rotating outside their respective regiments to fill gaps along the perimeter. In some instances a regiment that consisted of five battalions would only have one of its original battalions assigned to it at a given time. Davis saw this as a serious breach in unit integrity and stated,

> "I couldn't believe what I found out there. In the Marine Corps, even though we had fixed regimental organization tables, we had a shambles as far as organization on the ground was concerned. Rotating units in and out of the fixed positions only served to disrupt the organization. The regimental commander did not know his unit at all."[51]

The first change Davis instituted was restoring unit integrity of his infantry regiments. By nightfall on the day of his change of command, Davis, confident that the forward defensive positions could be reduced in size, ordered the fixed battalion locations be reduced to company size units. This immediately released two maneuver battalions which he would use to take the offensive. It also allowed, as much as tactically possible, his regimental commanders to maintain operational control over their organic battalions. No longer would a regimental commander have opcon over a mixture of battalions and rifle companies from a variety of other regiments. This move not only restored unit integrity, but also strengthened morale and forged a sense of belonging within the units.[52]

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[50] Richard D. Camp, "Taking Command: A Lesson in Leadership," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (June 1999), 77.
[51] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis, 195.*
[52] Murphy, 8.

Davis further enhanced the unity of his battalions by integrating permanent elements of engineering, artillery and communications to solidify a strong combined arms package. "Unit integrity is essential for high mobility mountain warfare- very complex, very fast moving operations where you must depend on people knowing each other and being able to respond. It was critical to the kind of war he wanted to fight."[53] As General Davis began to put the units back together, he knew the only way to build a competent force was to ensure the battalions and companies always had the same artillery unit behind them and engineering team supporting them. This quickly created a strong sense of unity within the battalions and significantly increased combat effectiveness as the infantrymen learned to trust in their supporting arms, knowing they would be there when they needed most.[54]

Quickly earning the respect of his division as a confident leader who utilized common sense in his guidance and tactics, General Davis created a new sense of enthusiasm within his division. He also established a daily routine of visiting the subordinate ground forces within his tactical area of responsibility all the way down to the company level. These were not cursory visits, but reflected his sincere interest in the activities and wellbeing of his Marines. General Davis instinctively knew how to inspire and unify his command by leading from the front, and during combat operations, his helicopter was often the first to land in a "hot" zone after the initial wave of the assault force had been inserted.[55] The principle of unity of command was skillfully demonstrated by General Davis as he established unit cohesion and elevated morale within the 3rd Marine Division. This would prove to be a contributing factor in the successful accomplishment of the new objectives laid down by General Davis.

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[53] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 195-196.
[54] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis, 195.*
[55] Robert H. Barrow, General, USMC (Retired). Telephone interview by Major Sam Munday, 31 Jan 1998.

OBJECTIVE

The most basic principle for success in any military operation is a clear and concise statement of an attainable objective. It should define the exact military action it intends to accomplish and will normally describe the nature and scope of the operation. The ultimate military objective of war is to defeat the enemy's armed forces or destroy his will to fight.[56] The successful achievement of an objective is largely dependent on tactical knowledge, skillful employment of the proper strategy, and sound leadership ability of the commander. The selection of an objective will need to take into consideration military and political goals, friendly forces available, intelligence gathered on enemy situation and capabilities, and the nature of the area of operations. The commander must have a strong understanding of the overall objective from higher headquarters, so he can consider all his courses of action in light of this objective, and clearly disseminate this information to his subordinates.[57] Clear and concise statements describing the objective will enhance the comprehension of the mission throughout each echelon of command. The ability of a commander to ensure the plan is understood from his subordinate commanders all the way down to the lance corporal walking the point is an important factor in determining a unit's chance to successfully accomplish the objective.

Davis

From the moment General Davis took command of the 3rd Marine Division he never wavered from his objective of aggressively pursuing the enemy within the Quang Tri Province. Immediately after his change of command, he addressed all his staff and regimental

[56] Schmitt, 2-1.
[57] George J. Thielemann, *On the Principles of War: An Elementary Framework*. Newport, Rode Island: (Naval War College, 1988), C-2.

commanders to give specific guidance on his objectives. He presented a copy of an article published in the Marine Corps Gazette on the subject of High Mobility. He announced that they would no longer sit back and guard fixed installations, but would use the mobile tactics outlined in the article as a guide. His Marines now had a clear understanding of his simple and straightforward objective, which was to use the overwhelming weight of all combat power available to search out and destroy the enemy's main forces.[58]

OFFENSIVE

While the principle of the objective requires the focus of effort to be centered on a clearly defined common goal, the principle of the offensive suggests that the employment of offensive tactics is the best means to seize, retain and exploit the initiative and the most effective means to ensure the accomplishment of the stated objective. Offensive action is the most decisive form of combat and is required if the initiative and freedom of action is to be maintained.[59] The commander who skillfully employs the offensive can steer the course of battle to his advantage and exploit the enemy's weaknesses. While it may be necessary to assume a defensive posture after an attack against the enemy to resupply and restore the energy of the force, it should only be a temporary pause that continues to foster the spirit of an active defense. During the Vietnam War, political restraints often limited the offensive options available to the commander. The mere fact that policy makers in Washington confined the war to the boundaries of South Vietnam ultimately defined the war as defensive in nature. Despite these restrictions, US forces continued to take the initiative and exploited offensive tactics to the greatest extent possible with remarkable success. Commenting on the importance of offensive action, Lieutenant General Holand Smith, USMC wrote, "Since I first joined the

[58] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 194-195.
[59] Schmitt, 2-2.

Marines, I advocated aggressiveness in the field and constant aggressive action. Hit quickly, hit hard and keep on hitting. Give the enemy no rest, no opportunity to consolidate his forces and hit you back. This is the shortest road to victory."[60]

Davis

In the spring of 1968, just prior to General Davis taking command, the 3rd Marine Division, consisting of 24,000 men, found themselves tied down in fixed positions south of the DMZ. The division's offensive ability was extremely limited as they were pressured to focus their main effort on building and manning the defensive barrier system as dictated by Secretary of State Robert McNamara. This system would cost over six billion dollars and deployed a series of strong points spread out across the top of South Vietnam. It consisted of a 600-meter wide clearing lined with barbed wire, electronic and acoustical sensors, and personnel minefields. Designed to stop North Vietnamese guerilla forces from infiltrating into the south, the barrier system consisted of three sections. The first section was a linear-manned obstacle system which extended along the eastern section of the DMZ some 20 miles to the South China Sea. Another section, also a series of strong points, was located along obvious avenues of approach across the western portion of the DMZ adjacent to the Laotian border. These strong points were anchored by numerous combat bases, Khe Sanh being the most western base. The last section was a scattering of sensors inside Laos along suspected routes of North Vietnamese infiltration branching from the Ho Chi Minh Trail.[61]

Despite serious concerns from General Walt, the III MAF commander, as to the lack of adequate personnel and materials to build and man the strong point system, the political

[60] Schmitt, 2-2.

[61] Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year, 1968*. (Washington DC: History and Museums Division, 1997), 11.

pressure to construct the system made it "sacrosanct" and the issue of its merit was not to be discussed much less argued about. General Westmoreland, Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), was also concerned with the Marines defensive posture and shortage of personnel, but was unable to convince Washington to increase troop strength to sufficient levels.[62] The additional friction from mounting casualties due to strong enemy opposition only drove the division deeper into their defensive posture.

The two months General Davis spent as the Deputy for the Provisional Corps Vietnam proved extremely valuable in preparing him to take over the 3rd Marine Division. After studying the strong point system, General Davis believed it was a faulty concept. It was designed to fight guerillas, when in fact they were fighting regular North Vietnamese Army Divisions. He learned that the strong points were too far apart and the NVA had the freedom to maneuver between the points and frequently attacked across the DMZ then quickly withdrew north for rest and resupply. The "McNamara Line" ultimately gave up the initiative to the enemy. The Marines had all but lost their offensive spirit, as defense became the name of the game. The division continued to take heavy casualties as they contacted the enemy day after day until relieved by the next battalion rotating into that strong point sector. The Marines were not exploiting the enemy, nor pursuing, or massing troops to overwhelm the enemy, just holding on to fixed positions. During 1967, five thousand Marines had been killed or wounded along the DMZ and the morale of the unit was at an all time low.[63]

This was soon to change as General Davis took command and turned the division upside down. With permission from higher headquarters, he immediately ordered the division to scale down the battalion sized strong point positions to company size and organized a mobile force

[62] Shulimson, 21-24.
[63] Camp, 77.

of several battalions with the remainder of the division. When questioned by a news reporter of the perception that reducing the ground force at Khe Sanh was giving it up after the Marine Corps had paid so much to keep it, Davis replied, "I can manage that whole area with a couple of mobile battalions better than it was being managed with five battalions fixed in place."[64] The 3rd Marine Division was now on the move. Even though the Marines were initially skeptical about coming out of their defensive hole, they quickly regained their motivation as they took back the initiative from the enemy and were fighting the way Marines were trained. Within a four-month period, the offensive actions of the division destroyed five North Vietnamese Army Divisions in the Quang Tri Province. The key to their success would prove to be the superior coordination of combined arms and the effective employment of maneuver warfare under the guidance of General Davis.

MANEUVER

This principle deals with the movement of forces on the battlefield in relation with the enemy and in combination with friendly fire in order to gain a positional advantage. The moving of forces in itself will not normally produce decisive results; however, maneuver can establish favorable conditions that will allow the force to close with and destroy the enemy. Effective maneuver will allow a force to sustain the initiative while keeping the enemy off balance by rendering his actions ineffective.[65] The objective of maneuver is to utilize forces in such a manner that places the enemy in a position of disadvantage and achieves victory over the enemy that may have otherwise required greater cost in manpower and material. Successful application of this principle requires solid coordination of combined arms fire and movement, as well as the flexibility and ingenuity of all available assault support assets such as

[64] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 195.
[65] Schmitt, 2-2.

transport and attack helicopters. Maneuver is also used to exploit a recent success, preserve freedom of action, and reduce potential areas of vulnerability.[66] A commander who can skillfully apply the principle of maneuver can gain the advantage over his opponent by setting the terms on where and when to fight the battle and exploiting the tactical advantage he has won through his maneuvering.

Davis

General Davis incorporated this principle into his strategy to break the 3rd Marine Division from their defensive posture and exploit the enemy through maneuver and mobility as the Army had using airmobile tactics. He noted that,

> "When the Army moved into Operation Pegasus to relieve the Khe Sanh operation, they applied force directly responsive to the enemy's disposition and forgot about real estate—forgetting about bases, going after the enemy in key areas—this punished the enemy most. Pegasus demonstrated the complete decisiveness of this high mobility operations."[67]

The foundation of this high mobility concept rested on four key elements: strong morale, effective helicopter lift, accurate intelligence, and responsive firepower. General Davis' skillful use of these were key in his success over the NVA forces.

His use of helicopter assault support for troop inserts closely mirrored the US Army's tactics within the 1st Cavalry and the 101st Airborne Division. The implementation of this concept also coincided with the arrival of an improved version of the CH-46, the Corps primary troop lift helicopter which could more Marines than the previous model.[68]

The airmobile concept would pose new challenges for General Davis, as his division would require increased air support that could respond quickly to fast paced operations.

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[66] Schmitt, 2-2.
[67] Benis M. Frank, *General Raymond Davis, USMC (Retired)*. Oral history transcription produced by the History Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps. (Washinton, D.C., 1978), 17.
[68] Frank, 20.

Normally, a division would be supported by its own air wing, approximately 300 aircraft, but in Vietnam, one wing supported two separate divisions. The wing was located at Danang which was in the general area of the 1st Marine Division, giving them easier access and tighter coordination with that division than with the 3rd Marine Division, located 70 miles north. In order to ensure the essential air support needed for his new mobile tactics, General Davis helped coordinate with the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing to create a Provisional Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 39, that established a forward operating base within the 3rd Marine Division's area of operation at Combat Base Vandegrift.[69]

Another concern with the wing was that neither the Division Air Officer nor the MAG 39 commander had the appropriate authority to make quick decisions that were paramount in a fast paced tactical environment. The solution was moving the Assistant Wing Commander, Brigadier General Homer D. Hill, forward to serve as a direct liaison with the division. Located within the Division Headquarters, and constantly appraised of the immediate tactical situation, General Hill had the "horsepower" to make the critical decisions regarding weather and safety restrictions, flight waivers, and wing priorities when they conflicted with other units. The forward staging of these helicopter assets at Vandegrift proved instrumental in timely rearming, refueling, ground unit resupply, medivacs, and emergency troop insert and extracts. This enabled ground operations to maintain a high tempo.[70] The improved coordination between 1st MAW and the 3rd Marine Division and having General Hill co-located with the ground component gave General Davis the flexibility he needed to successfully conduct large scale, heliborne assaults.

Once he had established the air support required, General Davis began a series of airborne

[69] Charles R. Smith, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: High Mobility and Standown 1969*. (Washington D.C.: History and Museum Division HQMC, 1988), 17.
[70] R.C. Davis [sic] and H.W. Brazier, "Defeat of the 320th," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (March 1969), 30.

operations throughout his division's tactical area of responsibility that would route numerous NVA divisions and capture large enemy food, weapons, and munitions stockpiles. His success was largely attributed to the teamwork between ground, air, and artillery units. Artillery fire support bases were established to progressively insert infantry units further north without sacrificing the protective fan of artillery support which proved to be key to the entire scheme of maneuver.[71]

Previously, artillery fire support bases were tied to locations near roads that facilitated construction and resupply. They were now being established in forward positions located atop key terrain features which could more effectively support the maneuver units. The essence of this concept was to construct easily defendable positions which overlapped the range fans of other mutually supporting fire support bases and cover all helicopter landing zones and infantry positions within the fans. The displacement of the fire bases allowed indirect fires to keep pace with the maneuver units which could now "leap-frog" over great distances in mountainous terrain without a break in artillery support.[72]

In preparation of a fire support base, intensive artillery fires and airstrikes would be directed at the proposed landing zone to both demoralize the enemy and remove obstacles from the zone. After the initial assault, engineers escorted by a small security team would finish clearing the zone with helicopter-transportable tractors to fit the appropriate number of artillery pieces and at least one CH-46 helicopter within a 24-36 hour period.[73]

From 15 August to 26 October 1968, ten new fire bases were constructed in support of operations against the 320th NVA Division. They ranged from small razorback and high

[71] R.C. Davis and H.W. Brazier, 26.
[72] R.C. Davis and H.W. Brazier, 26.
[73] R.C. Davis and H.W. Brazier, 26.

pinnacle landing zones that employed one battery of 105mm howitzers to larger bases that were occupied by two batteries of 105mm howitzers and a platoon of 155mm howitzers.[74] The flexibility that General Davis created with the new maneuver concept was enormous. Battalions that were once tied down to a combat support base were now relatively unconstrained to roam the mountainous terrain of eastern I Corps, rooting out and destroying enemy units, base camps, and logistical infrastructure. According to one of the artillery battalion commanders, Colonel Joseph Scoppa,

> "The new mobility of the artillery had transformed the war in the north. The enemy did not know how to cope with this rapid deployment. We are now able to get into areas where he did not expect us to be able to come into. In a matter of days we could span 16 clicks, sometimes 24 in three moves. Charlie can't move out quite that fast. We got in with him where he is."[75]

During General Davis' command, the 3rd Marine Division conducted several major operations within the Quang Tri Province including Operation Dawson River and Dawson River West, Operation Dewey Canyon, Operation Purple Martin, and Operation Maine Crag. Each operation was a success; however, none was more renowned than the 9th Marines in Operation Dewey Canyon. Conducted over a period of one month, the operation accounted for 1617 NVA killed, 1233 captured small arms weapons, 16 artillery pieces, 73 antiaircraft guns, 26 mortars, 104 machineguns, 92 trucks, over 807,000 rounds of ammunition, and more than 220,000 pounds of rice.[76] Dewey Canyon epitomized the tactical success of the high mobility concept and further served to validate General Davis' superb leadership.

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[74] R.G. Davis and H.W. Brazier, 27.
[75] Shulimson, 551.
[76] Smith, 50.

MASS

As an enabler of offensive action, the principle of mass, or concentration of forces, delivers superior combat power at a decisive time and place in order to achieve decisive results. The massing of forces in conjunction with proper application of other principles of war such as surprise and maneuver, may enable a numerically inferior force to achieve decisive results.[77] US Army doctrine states that "synchronizing all the elements of combat power where they will have decisive effect on an enemy force in a short period of time is to achieve mass. To mass is to hit the enemy with a closed fist, not poke at him with the finger of an open hand."[78] The concept of superiority of forces is not restricted to the massing of infantry forces. Optimum concentration of forces often requires, along with superior numbers, the proper mixture of combat elements that may include fires such as artillery and close air support and other service support elements. The lethal effects of today's modern weapons make it essential to mass a force quickly and unexpectedly from dispersed locations and upon completion of the mission the timely separation back to dispersed formations. The military theorist Linddell Hart portrayed the importance of this principle in simple terms, "the principles of war could, for brevity, be condensed into a single word – Concentration."[79]

Davis

General Davis' ability to concentrate forces and firepower at decisive points overwhelmed the enemy and completely disrupted the NVA's ability to retake the initiative. One of the unique ways General Davis used to mass forces was the integration of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) into his operations within the Quang Tri Province. The close

[77] Schmitt, 2-2.
[78] Evans, 72.
[79] Schmitt, 2-2.

cooperation and coordination, which General Davis fostered between the combined forces, proved to be instrumental in concentrating force against the NVA. The combining of ARVN and Marine forces created the "gang-tackling" or "piling-on" techniques that successfully applied the principle of mass.[80]

Another concept General Davis stressed in following this principle was the power of combined arms. He had an unwritten "law" that no unit was allowed to lose a fight with the enemy. He could justify this law because his division would never take on the enemy without piling on the support and troops and whatever it took to ensure that they won the skirmish. During one of his division's assaults into the western Quang Tri Province he demonstrated the importance of the combined firepower of ground, air and artillery against the enemy. He coordinated a total of ten B-52 airstrikes, each dropping 150 tons of ordinance prior to the assault and the continuation of artillery support throughout the engagement. Helicopters also supported the attack by transporting troops in mass, totaling 2,080, into twenty one different landing zones throughout the area of operation. The combined destructive power of these fires produced a tremendous shock effect which caused the enemy to lose command and control at a critical time and reduced his ability to respond effectively to the assault.[81]

It is evident that General Davis took the principle of mass very seriously and considered it essential to the concept of high mobility operations. To him there was no excuse for losing and if a unit had been hit hard, the first question he would ask the battalion commander was how many rounds of artillery were fired. If the amount was inadequate and the commander found negligent in this area, he was reprimanded by General Davis and in several instances commanders were relieved for such errors that put Marines in jeopardy.[82]

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[80] R.G. Davis and S.W. Bell, "Combined Operations with ARVN," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Oct,1969), 20.
[81] R.G. Davis and H.W. Brazier, 28.
[82] Camp, 83.

ECONOMY OF FORCE

This principle is one that requires close examination during the planning stages of an operation when the commander must make informed decisions on what the main and secondary focuses of effort will be and how he can best distribute his deployable forces and prudently allocate his resources. Experience tells us that there are never sufficient resources to meet every assigned task. Consequently, the commander will often be required to accept some level of risk by allocating a reduced combat force to a secondary mission, usually limited to delaying actions, deceptions, limited attacks or defensive positions, in order to achieve overwhelming superiority at the main focus of effort.[83] It takes a skilled leader with sound intelligence to efficiently employ multiple well-balanced forces with the proper concentration of combat power not only at the primary objective, but also the secondary focuses of effort.

Davis

General Davis' most evident demonstration of economy of forces goes back to his decision to move his division from their defensive posture and take the offensive against the NVA. Although he was still required to defend strong points along the DMZ, General Davis was convinced this was a secondary mission and that his primary focus of effort should be to search and destroy the enemy through mobility. By reducing the size of his strong point units from battalion size to company size, he could now utilize the majority of his division as maneuver units to achieve overwhelming superiority at the main focus of effort.

Another example of his application of economy of force was his understanding of the importance of establishing a strong relationship with the ARVN forces through cooperation,

[83] Schmitt, 2-2.

coordination, and training. From April through October 1968, successful combined operations with local forces turned the most highly contested province in Vietnam to one of the most secure as they devastated three main NVA Divisions. By December 1968, General Davis was able to cut his maneuver units in half and utilize ARVN units to support security efforts in the north. This enabled him to devote more Marine resources to the search and destruction of enemy infrastructure.[84]

It is evident that General Davis demonstrated a keen ability to employ a well-balanced force that properly utilized all combat power available to effectively accomplish both primary and secondary missions.

SECURITY

The principle of security focuses on the protection of friendly forces from enemy activities that may prevent freedom of action. It involves both active and passive measures to prevent surprise and deny the enemy useful information about friendly forces, capabilities and future plans. Commanders must be careful not to become overly cautious and isolate themselves in a passive security posture. Security can actually be enhanced by bold maneuver and offensive action. Effective reconnaissance patrols are an extremely beneficial active security measure, which can be used to collect vital information concerning enemy positions, strengths and intentions. A commander can utilize this crucial information to improve security and reduce his unit's vulnerability to surprise. [85]

[84] R.G. Davis and S.W. Bell, 19.
[85] Schmitt, 2-3.

Davis

General Davis rigorously employed active measures to establish force security and relied heavily on reconnaissance patrolling to gather important information concerning enemy activities. The 3rd Marine Divisions area of operations within the Quang Tri Province consisted of 1,300 square miles. At any one time, up to 40% of this area was considered secure by mobile forces conducting offensive operations. General Davis required the remaining 60% to be covered by small, four to six man, reconnaissance teams. Over 1,600 of these patrols were conducted in 1968 which was approximately 130 patrols per month. On a given day, 20 patrols would be in the field and 10 others were in the process of extraction and debriefing or repairing for the next insertion. Of the 20 patrols in the field, approximately four teams would typically be in some form of contact with the enemy.[86]

These patrols fell into two categories, referred to as Sting Ray or Key Hole patrols. The Sting Ray concept was used to strike the enemy utilizing the advantage of surprise and conducted within range of friendly artillery fire. Key Hole patrols were conducted at the outer edges of the division boundaries which were beyond friendly artillery range. These patrols were to observe the enemy and collect valuable intelligence. This information was then used to plan the objectives for upcoming missions and allowed the Marines to maintain the initiative over the NVA.[87]

General Davis' requirement for maximum employment of reconnaissance patrols was an extremely effective means of force security. It gave him a continuous picture of the enemy situation and allowed him to hit enemy forces before they could organize a substantial attack. His offensive spirit minimized his division's vulnerability to surprise attacks and by the beginning of 1969, the remainder of NVA soldiers had been eliminated from the villages

[86] R.G. Davis and J.L. Jones, "Employing the Recon Patrol," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (May, 1969), 41.
[87] R.G. Davis and J.L. Jones, 41-42.

within the Quang Tri Province. General Davis had a running challenge with the newsmen telling them, "you can point anywhere in this province, day or night, and we'll land there and I'll take off my pistol and we'll walk around there alone, to show you how secure it is."[88]

SURPRISE

To achieve surprise, a commander will seek to attack an enemy at a time, place, or by a method for which the enemy is unprepared or not expecting. The principle of surprise is achieved when an opposing force has been rendered incapable of reacting effectively to an attack. Elements contributing to the principle of surprise are originality, speed, operational security (OpSec), night operations, effective and timely intelligence, deception, application of unexpected combat power, variation in tactics, and the use of terrain that appears unfavorable. The element of surprise gives the attacking force the advantage of gaining the initiative while forcing the enemy to react under stressful conditions. Surprise is a powerful influence to an attack, which can decisively effect the outcome of a battle and prove to be a great equalizer when challenged with a numerically inferior force.[89]

Davis

General Davis shrewdly applied the intelligence information he received from his reconnaissance patrols to gain the element of surprise over the enemy. His fast paced airmobile tactics which utilized fire bases to catapult his maneuver units into the heart of the enemy completely saturated the NVA with overwhelming combat power and rendered them incapable of reacting effectively to the attack.

[88] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis,*197.
[89] Schmitt, 2-3.

Operation Dewey Canyon shows examples of how Davis' division skillfully applied the elements of surprise to gain the advantage over the enemy. During this operation, the 9th Marines utilized deception, night ambushes, effective intelligence, and sheer audacity to surprise NVA forces. The operation took place along the Laotian border, 35 miles west of Hue City. The area was generally mountainous jungle that opened up into the A Shau and Da Krong Valleys. The NVA had reopened a supply route within the area and had fortified it with anti-aircraft positions. The 9th Marines, commanded by Colonel Robert Barrow, would be the first major U.S. force to enter the area with the missions of denying the NVA access into critical populated areas, destroy enemy forces and equipment, and disrupt NVA supply routes.[90]

According to Lieutenant General Richard G. Stilwell, Commanding General XXIV Corps, Vietnam, "Dewey Canyon deserves some space in American military history by sole reason of audacity." Such a bold move by an independent regiment inserted 50 kilometers from the nearest base camp deep in enemy territory enabled Davis' 9th Marines to surprise and catch the NVA forces off guard. They never expected U.S. forces to be so daring as to meet them head on so far from home base while being subjected to thin supply lines.[91]

While the majority of the regiment was engaged in combat with NVA forces, Company H of the 2nd battalion was given the order to conduct a night ambush along the Laotian border. Intelligence assets revealed an enemy supply convoy moving to reinforce units engaged with the main forces of the 9th Marines. Company H wisely utilized a deception plan as part of their ambush mission by leaving one platoon back at base camp. Each squad spread out and filled in a platoon size position to give the appearance that the entire company was still in place. In addition to the cover of darkness, this deception plan gave the ambush unit an added

[90] Gordon M. Davis, "Dewey Canyon: All Weather Classic," *Marine Corps Gazette,* (July 1969), 34.
[91] G.M. Davis, 35.

level of surprise.[92] The ambush was a success as the team destroyed three convoy trucks loaded with supplies and ammunition and slowed down the remainder of the convoy enough that they were unsuccessful in resupplying NVA forces engaged with the regiment. Company H's superb utilization of surprise contributed to a significant victory that required the enemy to forfeit critical supplies to frontline forces and gave the 9th Marines the advantage they needed to defeat the NVA in their own territory.

SIMPLICITY

Simplicity is a valuable contributor to mission success. Clear, simple orders that minimize confusion are extremely important. Requiring a unit to decipher a complicated plan while dealing with the effects of fog and friction of war can quickly debilitate its combat effectiveness. It is usually difficult enough to execute a simple plan in combat, so a difficult plan will lower the odds for success.[93] Writing after the American Civil War, General Ulysses S. Grant stated, "The art of war is simple enough. Find out where your enemy is. Get at him as soon as you can. Strike at him as soon as you can and as often as you can, and keep moving on."[94] General Grant seemed to not only touch on simplicity, but also incorporated most of the principles of war in his statement. He simplified it as maneuver to strike the enemy with overwhelming force where he least expects it, and as the enemy is trying to react to the first punch, attack him again from another direction.

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[92] David Winecoff, "Night Ambush," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (January 1984), 48.
[93] Schmitt, 2-3.
[94] Evans, 125.

This definition of simplicity closely resembled the principle as portrayed by General Davis. He was able to synchronize multiple combat means of power around the sophisticated concept of mobile operations and reduce it to clear and simple orders that ensured maximum simplicity in combat execution. While referring to Operation Dewey Canyon, during a reunion commemorating the operation, Major General Robert H. Barrow said,

> "Some of the simplest things in life are the most difficult. Therefore, we should not draw any wrong conclusions about difficulties and simplicity in Dewey Canyon. It was a difficult operation, but simplicity applied to our objectives, scheme of maneuver, the entire execution."[95]

Continuous experience of combat operations in familiar surroundings can help a unit break down a complex mission into it's simple forms and relieve some of the fog and friction of combat. Prior to Operation Dewey Canyon, the 9th Marines spent eight months operating in the thick jungles of the western Quang Tri Province. Acquiring substantial tactical experience in adverse environmental conditions allowed them to achieve simplicity through familiarity of their battlefield surroundings and confidence in their ability to accomplish any mission assigned.[96]

Along with seeking simplicity within his own force, Davis also sought to create overwhelming complexity and anxiety within the minds of his enemy through the use of speed, maneuver and the massing of combined arms. The enhanced complexity of modern warfare offers an even greater opportunity for the fog and friction of war and General Davis excelled at relieving this friction from his units and inflicting it on his enemy. Davis' adherence to the basic concepts of the principles of war gave his Marines a clear and simple understanding of their mission within the concept of high mobility operations. The straightforward principle of

[95] Robert H. Barrow, "Operation Dewey Canyon," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (November 1981), 89.
[96] G.M. Davis, 35.

this concept was the overwhelming weight of combat power to find and defeat the enemy's main forces. General Davis' application of simplicity in the utilization of the principles of war gave his division a solid understanding of commander's intent and the ability to skillfully execute decisive operations against the enemy that would defeat every NVA division operating within the Quang Tri Province.

CONCLUSION

In studying General Davis' combat leadership in Vietnam, it is clear that his proficient application of the fundamental principles of war, even under the weight of political interference, led to his division's overwhelming success on the battlefield. These principles have been the foundation of the evolution of the art of war throughout history and their significance again validated through the skillful leadership of General Davis. His ability to properly assess the priorities and risks involved in applying the various principles of war were a reflection of Sun Tzu's concept of the true art of waging war.

The pride and esprit de corps General Davis brought to the 3rd Marine Division remain legendary. Colonel Richard Camp, a former aide during his command of the division, wrote years later, "looking back over the years I have come to realize what a tremendous individual he was. I think you will agree that he had superb tactical ability – probably the finest division commander the Corps has ever had. I was fortunate enough to see him remotivate an entire division so that it became a winning team."[97] His tactical prowess and unique "sixth sense" in discerning the enemy's vulnerabilities also distinguished his superior qualities as a general officer. General Creighton W. Abrams, Jr., Westmoreland's successor as commander of MACV said, "Of the 50 or so division commanders I have known in Vietnam, General Davis

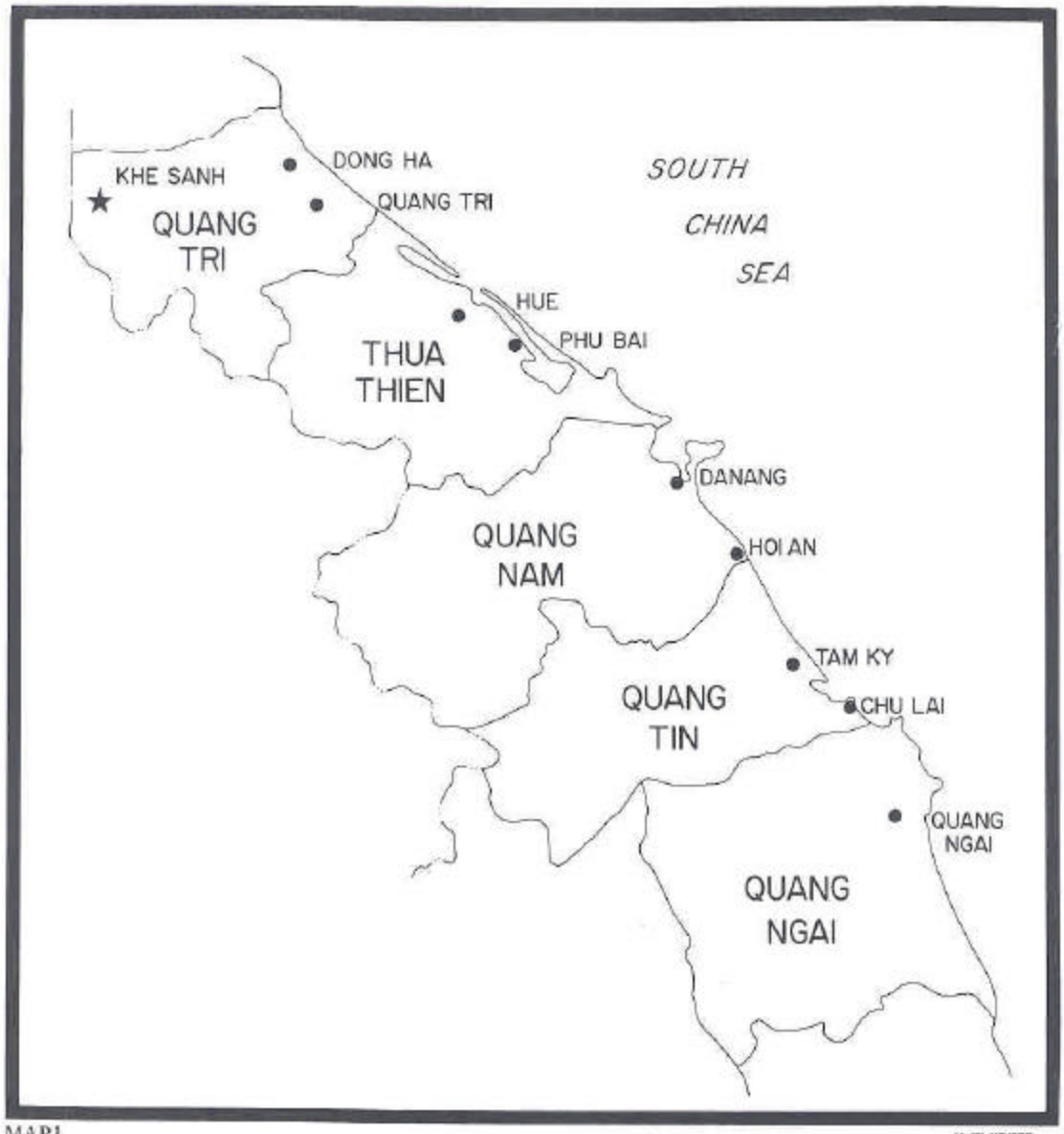
[97] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 194.

has no peer. He is the Best."[98] For his actions in Vietnam, General Davis was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal and three personal decorations by the Vietnamese Government.

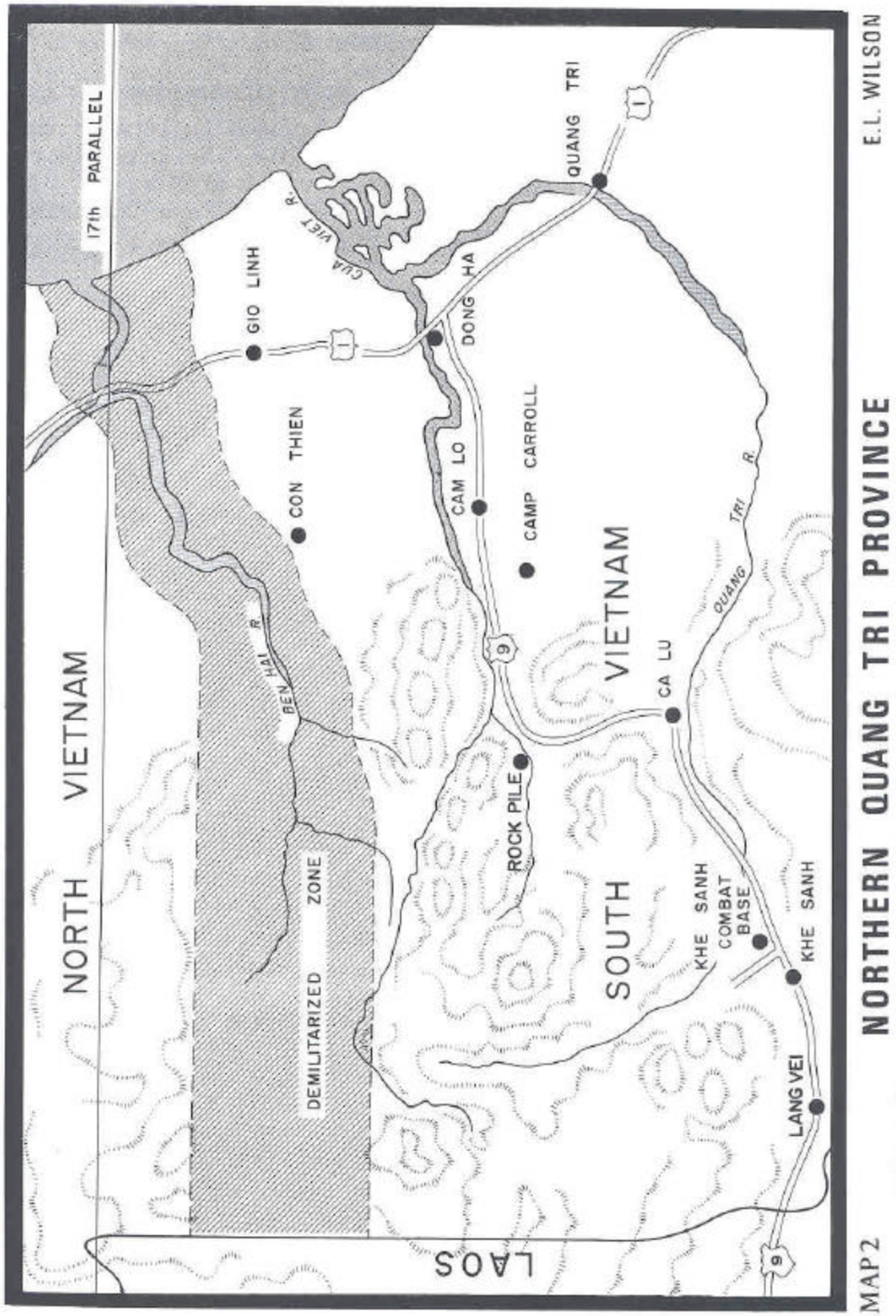
Upon his return to the United States in May of 1969, he served as the Deputy for Education at the Marine Corps Development and Education Command, Quantico, Virginia and after his promotion to Lieutenant General in 1970 he took over as Commanding General for the Education Command. General Davis received his fourth star in 1970 and took the position as Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. After 33 years of faithful service, General Davis retired from the Marine Corps and has been remembered by history as one of the finest military leaders of his time.[99]

[98] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 3.
[99] Davis, *The Story of Ray Davis*, 243.

MAP 1: I CORPS TACTICAL ZONES



MAP 2: NORTHERN QUANG TRI PROVINCE



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