

Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations

reviewed by Capts M.S. Hanks & M.P. Magyar

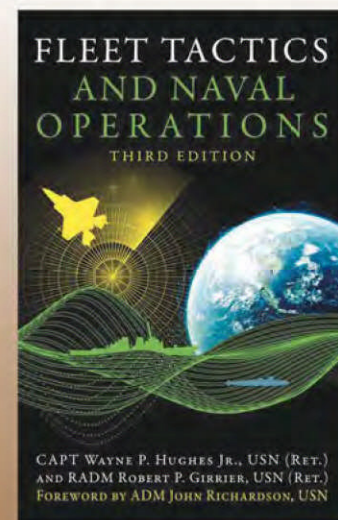
The *Marine Corps Operating Concept* (MOC) is actively guiding the Service back to its naval roots, but this is quite easier said than done. With the exception of ARG and MEU deployments, the two Services have operated independent of one another since 2002. To rekindle the treasured relationship between the Navy and Marine Corps in a 21st century environment, the two Services must develop a mutual understanding. The Marine Corps uses *MCDP 1, Warfighting*, to describe its warfighting philosophy and how it understands, prepares for, and wages war. *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations: Third Edition* by CAPT Wayne P. Hughes Jr., USN (Ret) and RADM Robert P. Girrier, USN (Ret) provides parallel information from a naval perspective. In an extremely articulate manner, Hughes and Girrier analyze and synthesize history to determine constants, trends, and variables associated with fleet tactics and naval operations up through the modern era, accurately capturing the changing character of war in the naval realm. *Fleet Tactics* is especially significant for Marines today because it represents a gateway toward achieving the naval-based aspirations of the MOC.

If readers compare *Fleet Tactics* to Marine Corps doctrinal publications, they will observe that the Navy and Marine Corps possess similar but different tactical principles. Although “[a]t sea the predominance of attrition over maneuver is a theme so basic that it runs throughout this book,” Marines should not see this as a distinction from maneuver warfare, but rather an acceptance that “[f]orces

>The authors were students at Expeditionary Warfare School, academic year 2018–19, when they wrote this book review.

at sea are not broken by encirclement; they are broken by destruction.”¹ In fact, proper fleet tactics aim to shatter an enemy’s system through a variety of rapid, concentrated, and unexpected strikes at a specific time and place through operational maneuver of sea space.² The principles of offense and defense for naval forces are contrary to those of ground forces because “[a]n inferior [naval] force cannot assume a defensive position and exact a substantial toll.”³ A fleet is primarily an offensive weapon operating in a maritime environment and, as a result, functions under different principles than land forces. The fact that shore-based forces have a significant advantage in the defense compared to sea-based forces highlights the importance of the Marine Corps’ contribution to the joint force maritime component commander. Power projection and sea control are two capabilities in which the Marine Corps is avidly modernizing, and it is important that Marines understand why the Service is putting so much investment into these areas. *Fleet Tactics* answers that question and reinforces the necessity of the Marine Corps in naval operations.

Most interesting to Marines is how *Fleet Tactics* describes littoral warfare as an increasingly complex challenge



FLEET TACTICS AND NAVAL OPERATIONS: Third Edition. By CAPT Wayne Hughes, Jr., USN (Ret) and RADM Robert Girrier, USN (Ret). Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-1682473375, 408 pp.

for the Navy, and one that is gaining substantial attention within the Service. The Marine Corps could have a significant role in naval operations in littoral environments because “it is no longer possible to define a fleet merely as a set of warships, because land-based systems play a prominent part.”⁴ This argument justifies the joint development of operating concepts such as expeditionary advanced based operations and littoral operations in a contested environment, both of which aim to achieve sea control and power projection in contested littoral areas. However, these concepts are more than simply operating in a new environment with new equipment. The nature of combat in the littorals may require an alteration to the traditional command relationship between the Navy and Marine Corps.⁵ To be successful in these operating concepts, the Navy and Marine Corps must first understand

how the other one operates, for “[t]he engagements that have been fought for the control of coastal regions have been most effective when land, sea, and air forces have acted in concert.”⁶ For maximum effectiveness, the Navy and Marine Corps must achieve a mutual understanding before the onset of conflict. Reading *Fleet Tactics* is an important step toward harmony in the littorals.

Today, the ever-increasing pace of technology and the emergence of space and cyberspace domains have significant influences on fleet tactics and naval operations; however, Hughes and Girrier argue “[t]actical and strategic change wrought by technology is a great constant”⁷ and does not represent a new phenomenon. Robotics, missiles, and information will dominate the future battlefield and, in turn, shape the way naval forces fight. Marines must understand that “[a] commander at sea fights a 24 hour war,” and “[i]t is the nature of naval combat to be fast-paced, deadly, and decisive.”⁸ By understanding where fleet tactics originate from and how they might look in the future, Marines can identify areas where expeditionary MAGTFs could provide immeasurable support in naval operations.

Overall *Fleet Tactics* focuses heavily on surface fleet tactics but forgoes detailed integration with the rest of the naval service and within a joint force. Curiously underrepresented is the specified role of Naval Special Operations Forces and the Marine Corps in littoral environments. Hughes and Girrier argue, “American warships depend for survival on outscouting the enemy,” a function that the aforementioned forces could undoubtedly enhance.⁹ The absence of such a perspective represents a golden invitation for future collaboration between the services.

All Marine officers and senior SNCOs should read *Fleet Tactics*, for as LtGen Victor “Brute” Krulak wisely stated, “The Corps must never, never forget—that their future, as has their past, lies with the Navy.”¹⁰ Hughes and Girrier provide the foundation for modern naval warfare

at the tactical and operational levels: the perfect opportunity for Marines to gain an understanding of the Navy’s warfighting philosophy and begin the path towards becoming an effective element of the 21st century naval force.

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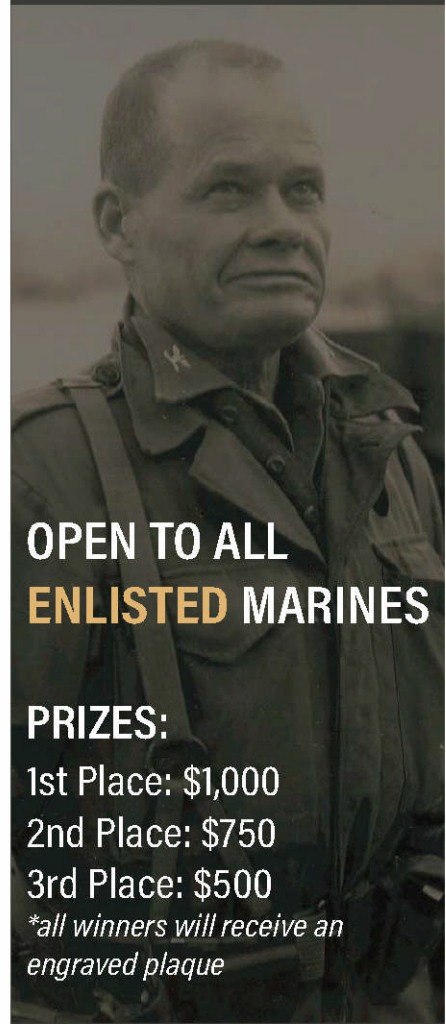
After all, the naval aspirations of the MOC will never be more than words without a baseline understanding of fleet operations at the tactical and operational levels; thus, the Marine Corps’ transition back to its naval roots and its success in future naval campaigns begins with reading *Fleet Tactics*.

Notes

1. CAPT Wayne P. Hughes and RADM Robert P. Girrier, *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations Third Edition*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018).
2. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 1, Warfighting*, (Washington, DC: June 1997).
3. *Fleet Tactics*.
4. Ibid.
5. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment*, (Washington, DC: 2017).
6. *Fleet Tactics*.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. LtGen Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps*, (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute, 1984).



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