

A REBUTTAL . . . TO LIDDELL HART



We learn and construct through discussion born of differences of opinion. No one commander draws the blueprint . . . victory, many times, is the result of intuition and second guessing. Here, a David casts his stone at a Goliath of tactics

By C. S. Roberts

❁ PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST common of human failings is the tendency to study only the facts that enhance a favorite theory — and many times this is done to prove a theory that the originator sincerely believes is correct. When paradoxes occur, many times the theorist casts a prejudiced eye on the troublesome spot and almost invariably regards the side most favorable to his views.

In all respect to the individual, the writer feels that this failure is evident in several places in Capt Liddell Hart's recent article *New Warfare—New Tactics* (Oct '55 GA-

ZETTE). It will illustrate the point by applying the same techniques in establishing a different theory.

Captain Hart has most decidedly outlined a new and sensible approach to the tactical and operational problems we face in striving to keep our principles of land warfare current with the rash of new weapons development. His studies, conclusions and solutions have been discussed in part by various publications — national magazines as well as military journals. He has done a superb job in presenting a new theory of defense, especially in his apt,

and quite English, allusions to the "Swarm of Bees Concept," "Controlled Dispersion," "Offensive Fluidity of Force," "Multiple Effect" and so on.

To say that this theory is all bad, or to say that it simply won't work, is at best a most dangerous statement. But even avid adherents must admit that there are many factors about our swarming bees that do not entirely preclude the possibility of disaster. Bad application of tactical doctrine is one thing. A faulty doctrine is quite another, and ultimately the more serious flaw.

Throughout his article, Capt Hart dances about the old, old theory that *defense is the Stronger Form*. He never actually reaches the point where he makes such a statement definite, but his article is fraught with examples that leave the reader no choice but to assume that he has at long last come to the fold of Von Leebe. Thus, let us consider the first section of this article.

Is Defense the Stronger Form?

Captain Hart makes the statement, in effect, that defense certainly must be the stronger form if the attack requires even the slightest advantage in odds—even if it is just 11-10. And here is the first great area of disagreement.

Only a fool would deny the old standby rule that an attacker should have a superiority of 3 to 1—and only a fool would deny that in some cases an even greater ratio in favor of the attacker is prudent.

But this rule is a local rule—meaning that at the chosen point of attack the superiority must be massive. Even if the basic rule called for 20 to 1 odds, it does not preclude the possibility that a smaller force could decisively defeat a larger one by shifting his center of gravity so rapidly and adroitly that the defender could not establish himself to the point where he could bring his massiveness to bear. Ten regiments across the mountain do you no good if your battalion on this side is being routed by an attacking regiment.

In addition, a search of military history will find few examples showing a defending army—no matter how skillful—that defended itself to victory. Defense at times, yes! A fluid defense, yes! Defense for a dozen reasons, yes! But defense as a basic concept for winning a war? Impossible.

Defense must always be considered only as a prudent and necessary halt in the attack in order to gain advantages—time, space, supply, replacement, reinforcement.

Captain Hart quotes the brilliant defensive maneuvers of the Germans in the last war—and brilliant they were. Less brilliant but equally effective was the defensive battle in Korea. A slugging match, perhaps, but still effective.

But in the German case, they ultimately lost the war. Even if they

had lasted for another 5 years, they would have lost the war unless they could have resumed the attack. In Korea, the United Nations did not win—they simply achieved a temporary stalemate.

Let the military historians find the example where a defender has consistently thwarted a determined, aggressive attacker to the point where the defender has won the conflict. Let the historians find the example, for the writer cannot.

Captain Hart lays heavy emphasis on what might be called the “lack of economy of force” when attacking. One striking example he utilizes is the British affair at Caumont, where 2 strong British corps attacked 2 weak German infantry regiments on a 10-mile front with the additional advantages of air superiority and a certain degree of surprise.

According to Capt Hart, upwards of 1,000 British tanks were involved and for at least the first 3 days the defender had no tanks at his disposal. If it cannot be said that the attack miscarried, it was at best a qualified victory. For many days no significant ground gains were made and certainly the final victory of the attack did not justify the use of such a mass of men and material.

Captain Hart uses this example as a prime lever in lifting his argument that the massive attack may be obsolete. Yet, in the same article, Capt Hart criticizes Allied action in 1944 and 1945 because it was “too often evident that a ‘divisional’ attack was in fact merely carried out by a tiny fraction of the available strength. . .”

In view of the fact that on many occasions Allied forces committed corps to the attack and yet only came in contact with the enemy by companies and battalions, is it fair to assume that huge, massive odds are necessary in order to guarantee the success of an attack? It is quite reasonable, at least, to say that perhaps the European campaign presented examples of poorly executed attacks against clever defenders. It is unreasonable to conclude that such examples render the attack obsolete or inefficient.

A question for the Captain—of the corps at Caumont, how many actual regiments closed with the enemy?

Shifting to Capt Hart’s fluid de-

tensive pattern, let us examine another factor. The Captain would have us defend by a controlled dispersion method rather than a linear arrangement. To be sure, he actually refers to his concept as an “offensive fluidity,” but in reality the offensive part consists merely of local spoiling attacks which would *not* have decisive effect. A prolific writer has termed a similar method the “Web Defense”—a quite descriptive title.

Let us assume that the enemy masses to attack. Let us assume that the spiders in the web constantly and effectively dull the edge of the attack with sharp but small thrusts, keep the attacker off balance by mobile side-stepping and generally confuse and hammer the enemy’s attack. Let us also assume that the enemy is unable to defeat in detail, although the peril of such a result is strong. So far so good. But will it *stop* the enemy’s attack? A determined, massed attacker prepared to take heavy casualties (as indeed the Russian is) can eventually bull, hack or slice his way through the Cobweb. In fact, the very name web contains the hint of its own destruction—that ultimately it is nothing but a cobweb that will hamper but not halt.

All of this last, of course, assumes that the principles of controlled dispersion and high mobility can be realized. Can they? At best, it is in question if these two elements can be achieved.

Indeed, it is easy in a paper war to call for a thrust here and a thrust there—but is it so simple on the ground? Military history is so fraught with examples of confusion, misinformation and general befuddlement that even the Great Captains admit sorrowfully that victory is many times the result of intuition and second guessing.

And where do you draw the line between controlled and uncontrolled dispersion? Control is a vital word in war, and seldom is it obtained in the full sense. Usually the lack of control is made up by the dash and initiative of smaller unit commanders who bull ahead on a hunch and by their very daring unbalance the enemy to the point where their imagination panics.

Captain Hart, in his article, mentions that a nation becomes more

defensive minded as it becomes more civilized. Perhaps the Captain is being entangled in his own cobweb.

Effect of New Weapons

In this area, observers of the military scene seem to be in general agreement. The use of nuclear weapons on a tactical scale is now an established factor. To assume that the enemy will not have similar means at his disposal is foolish—he may have them at this very moment.

However, there are limitations to the tactical use of such weapons. *One*, they cannot be used too close to friendly troops. *Two*, air delivery is as limited as ever because of weather and observation limitations. *Three*, artillery delivery—although effective and weatherproof—has limited range. *Four*, guided missiles depend upon electronics or navigation—the first highly susceptible to countermeasures and the latter subject to error.

But, nuclear weapons have one far reaching and important effect. If they do not necessarily eliminate the linear conception of warfare, they do make imprudent the classical massing for creation of a center of gravity.

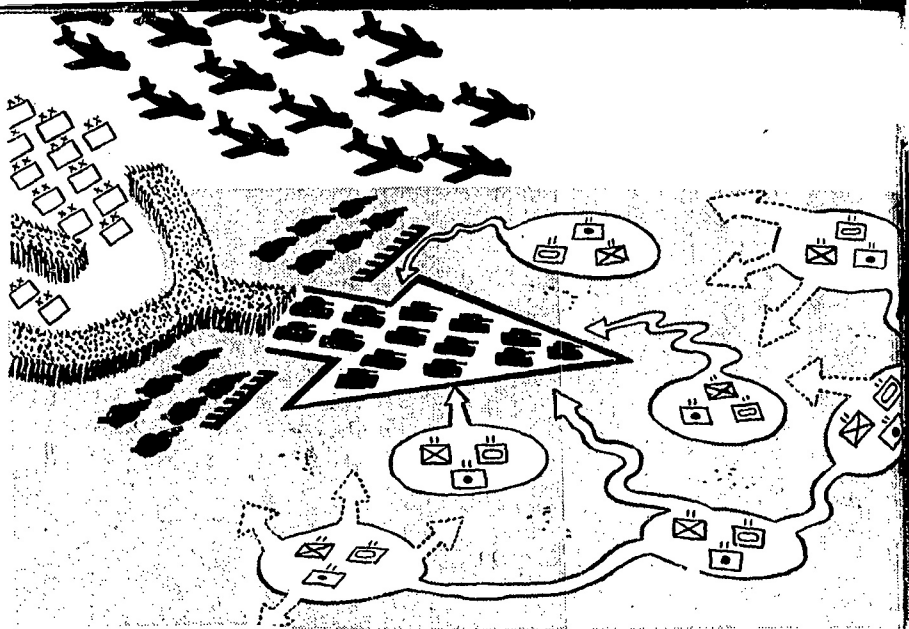
The effect of nuclear weapons on communications zone installations is so obvious it does not warrant comment—except to say that supply may become more inefficient and costly because of the necessity for dispersion, but by no means impossible.

Is Massing Obsolete?

Massing, in the classical sense, is definitely out of the question. But this does not mean that the advantages of mass have conveniently disappeared. It merely means that to mass in the modern sense is to take care that your elements do not come into close physical contact until the last moment and, that even then, they join precisely at the point of attack. In other words, a converging approach rather than a consolidated one.

The word "mass," incidentally, conveys a mental picture of clogged highways, jammed orchards, soldiers standing shoulder-to-shoulder and so forth. This does not necessarily have to be the case.

A converging approach with sensible counterintelligence arrangements can present the enemy with



Is "controlled dispersion" merely a deepened linear defense

the sudden appearance of a strong attacking force so intricately entangled with his defending troops that the use of nuclear weapons becomes totally unacceptable.

To say that such a massing for the attack would be easy is nonsensical—but no more so than to say that it is impossible. Discipline and intricate, practical staff planning make it quite conceivable.

And Our Enemy—

Obvious to all except Asiatic-eyed fanatics, the retention of Europe in the Free World is the most vital single problem we have. And, obviously, we must absorb the first blow. We will never attack the Russians originally. We must, in the beginning, defend.

Also, we must assume that the Russians will come eventually—to-morrow, next month, next year. To think even for a moment that they might not come is tantamount to suicide. The results of the next war could be too awesome for us to give ourselves unrealistic comfort in the idle thought that they might not invade Europe.

And when they come, they will outnumber NATO forces. If they follow past patterns, they will mass in fantastic numbers and be prepared to absorb fantastic casualties. They will not be quick, because they are not mobile in the Western sense, but they will be a steady, crushing tide with a hardened heart for casualty lists.

It is wrong to definitely assume

that they will mass in the World War II manner, for they are not stupid and undoubtedly have a weather eye for nuclear weapons.

But they have the men and material to present NATO with a huge, rolling wave attack with no specific center of gravity—buttressed with shock units equipped with their excellent tanks and mammoth assault guns. They will probably have nuclear weapons, and if they do not control the air they will at least be on the verge of it throughout the campaign.

This is what NATO faces—and must defeat—not merely delay.

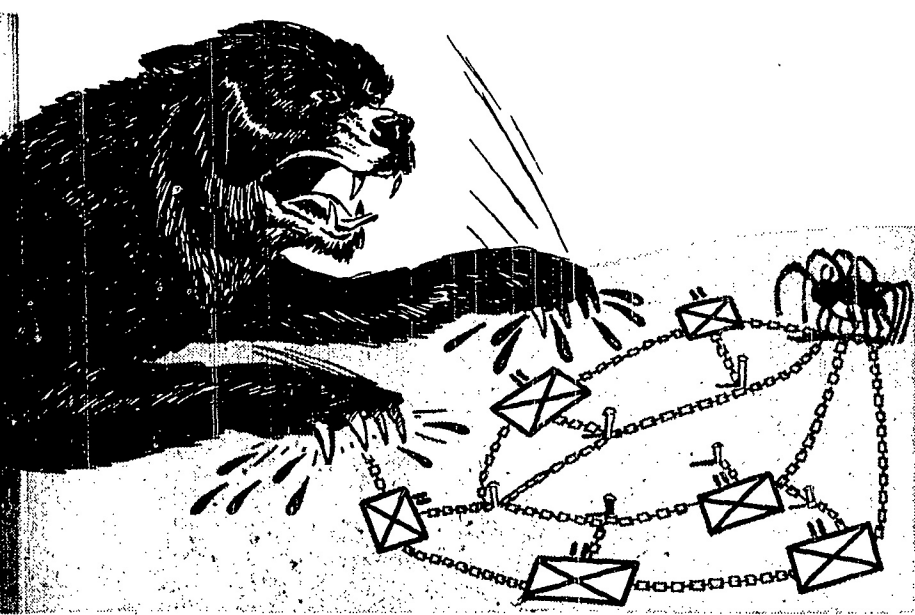
The "Fog" Concept

So many colorful names have been tagged onto tactical theories that the writer could not resist the temptation to follow suit.

The writer (successfully, he hopes) has slashed at the cobweb concept sufficiently enough to at least raise some doubts as to its wisdom. Here is an alternative.

First, let us adapt our units to the point where we eliminate the division except as a possible administrative organization. Let us bring our weapons down the organizational ladder so that we can form hard, well equipped, beefed-up regiments, battalions and task forces. Let each of these units be self-contained, independent forces specifically designed to operate on their own.

Also, let us abandon the linear concept—not necessarily because we feel that it has failed us, but pri-



... still vulnerable to piecemeal destruction by overwhelming mass?

marily because we do not have sufficient troops for it.

Let us establish as our basic concept of defense one that involves packet defense—similar to the cobweb approach but not limited to defending a given area. The primary mission of these packet units is to delay, confuse and cause casualties. They are to counterattack only when the opportunity is perfect—and then not to gain ground but to cause casualties.

Their rule of thumb must be to act the part of our World War II outpost on a larger scale—to force the enemy to stop, deploy and form for attack. They must strike with nuclear weapons, artillery and tactical air. Then they must fall back and repeat the performance in a predetermined position in the rear. They must not stay too long because they must not take heavy casualties—they must break off and leave with their equipment—better too soon than too late.

Considering the nature of our enemy, it is fairly safe to assume that their slowness of movement and lack of dash will almost eliminate the possibility of effective finger thrusts—but in the event that it occurs, our units must sidestep and withdraw.

In addition, we must have small, compact units without artillery, specifically trained as "uniformed guerrillas." They must infiltrate through the attacker's boundaries—land by helicopter or parachute—and they must have a basic mission of darting

at supply columns, command posts, bivouaced troops, bridges, communications lines. These units must be as thick as Capt Hart's bees—but small, elusive and annoying rather than decisive. They must have Marine Corps esprit with paratrooper imagination and Army doggedness. They must be trained to live off the land and depend only on occasional airdrops of supply.

Force the enemy to fight his way through such a maze—a "fog" of defending units that strike but cannot be cornered—that act as large scale snipers with nuclear rifles. Adroitly, these defenders can force the enemy to mass unknowingly and thus present nuclear targets.

As the enemy commits reserves to strike at a defending regiment, let the regiment disappear just before the blow arrives—force the enemy to take swing after swing without connecting.

Of course, one fact remains. The enemy is fighting a delaying, casualty producing fog in front and is being hampered in his rear by well directed, disciplined units. But he is still gaining ground—simply because we are letting him do it at great cost.

He has reserves and can take the losses. He continues to roll forward with jerks and stops. He must be allowed to come forward—come forward in a set pattern between the jaws of our massed reserves.

These reserves are massed in the modern sense—ready to converge and strike. A tattered, confused en-

emy has fought his way through a fog to come to our reserves—the reserves have not gone to him.

And when these reserves strike, they have one primary mission—to cause casualties and force local withdrawals so that the enemy is cramped into local nuclear targets.

Sooner or later, under such attrition, the enemy *must* stop. He may have advanced 200 miles. He may have made fantastic ground gains. But, his effectiveness has been worn to the point where he no longer has an effective offensive army.

And it is at this time that our massed reserves must begin concentrated counterattacks with lightning-bolt force to cut up corps and armies—form pockets for nuclear attack—and begin the march back—in *attack*—toward the enemy's homeland.

The Fog Defense does not require air supremacy—does not commit any unit to defend an area. It has elasticity to the most extreme degree because its basic concept is to cause casualties and confusion—to force the enemy to ultimately arrive exhausted at the doorstep of our fresh reserves. It takes the advantages of the Cobweb defense without that omnipresent risk of an eventual breakthrough that could mean disaster. Cobweb means a deep front—merely another form of linear defense. Fog means no front—only a slippery, casualty producing void that forces a struggling enemy to march to his destruction.

Fog Defense can be entirely preplanned. Staffs can bury supply dumps in appropriate places and can assign alternate missions to individual units. It requires only a minimum of interunit co-ordination.

Fog Defense does have one strict requirement, however. That is to produce in individual regiments the dashing initiative and esprit typical of the Marine Corps—the supreme feeling of confidence that enemy in the rear merely means turning around and fighting the other way.

In fact, Fog Defense means a return to the strong, reliable individual officer and soldier whose loyalty to his regiment or battalion is his primary purpose of life. One who is truly a vital part of a small, independent organization—not just another number of a horde of cannon fodder.

USMC