

# Fight's On!

## A call for a Red Diamond Maneuver Cup

by Maj Matthew W. Swan

**W**argames. Force on force. Competition. As Marines, we pride ourselves on our warrior ethos and culture, drawing inspiration from the rigorous training of the Roman legions, who conducted mock battles to prepare for real wars. However, do we truly engage in such comprehensive force-on-force training today? The reality is that we do not. When was the last time a reserve unit participated in a truly free-play, force-versus-force exercise lasting more than a few days? One where you had little to no information on the opposing force's location, systems, and capabilities? Chances are, you are drawing a blank. The reason is simple—the Marine Forces Reserve (MFR) has never conducted such an exercise before.

This type of training has historical precedence. However, it was not the Marines who pioneered it but the Army. In 1941, as World War II loomed, the Army launched the Louisiana Maneuvers, involving thousands of troops in force-on-force exercises across Louisiana, Texas, and the Carolinas. This training was instrumental in preparing American forces for the war, enabling leaders like GEN George Patton to refine their tactical expertise and experiment with new technologies.

What I propose is that MFR adopts this concept and establish an annual large-scale training exercise called the *Red Diamond Maneuver Cup* to prepare our Marines and sailors for future conflicts better.

### Why Do We Need This?

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are over. We must transition from training against static, under-equipped opposing forces to preparing for engagements against modern, well-equipped

adversaries. Our training must account for contemporary threats like drone swarms, armored assaults, and high-tech warfare, as seen in Ukraine. Additionally, rising tensions in the Indo-Pacific and potential conflicts involving peer adversaries like China demand that we refine our ability to fight in unpredictable engagements, either at small or large scale, and at various levels of intensity and duration.

War has no rules—only guidelines. The key question is: How do we respond to chaos? How do we react to unforeseen and unknown threats on the battlefield? As GEN Patton famously said, “An ounce of sweat saves a gallon of blood.”

### Training to Tailor Our Tactics

The Red Diamond Maneuver Cup would be a true free-play exercise—not scripted, not constrained by excessive rules, but governed by a simple set of adjudication guidelines and minimum parameters. This format would allow for the following:

- **Tactical experimentation:** Units could test and refine new tactics, techniques, and procedures, and technology in realistic combat conditions.
- **Unpredictability:** Units would enter without prior knowledge of the enemy's strength, equipment, or positioning.
- **Realism:** Engaging in an open-ended, force-on-force exercise fosters adaptability and problem-solving under pressure.

Having participated as an adversary force infantry company commander

during a Service-level training exercise, I witnessed firsthand how restrictive our current training conditions stifle creativity, preventing a true test of capabilities. Canadian Army Colonel Charles S. Oliviero stated in his book *Praxis Taciticum* that military leaders should “always strive to compete against a clever and worthy opponent.” The Red Diamond Maneuver Cup would ensure just that.

### How Would It Work?

Much like the movie *Fight Club*, there are no rules—okay, some rules. The intent is to create a training environment as close as possible to a modern battlefield.

- **Annual Force-on-Force Competition:** Two infantry battalions would be drawn from the 4th MarDiv—one from the 23rd and 25th Mar—plus supporting units from the Marine Logistic Group, Force Headquarters Group, and the Marine Air Wing, and would engage in a two-week force-on-force exercise. Additional participation from the Army Reserve and National Guard, Air Force, Navy, and even Space Force would be encouraged.
- **Realistic Combat Conditions:** Units arrive, receive orders, conduct mission planning, and launch into continuous combat operations for approximately ten days.
- **Diverse Scenarios:** One unit may have tank support, while the other may have drone and cyber warfare assets. Each year would feature different setups to simulate various

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conflict conditions. The scenarios and systems used would be pulled in from the current trends seen in the conflicts around the world, as well as potential future situations.

- **Varied Locations:** The exercise should rotate between different terrains—coastal, jungle, mountains, open plains—to reflect the Marine Corps' expeditionary nature.
- **Adjudication:** The Coyotes (referees) could be drawn from the participating MFR Inspector-Instructor staff or MFR personnel from the operations (G3) section, to assess unit performance fairly.
- **Funding:** The Red Diamond Maneuver Cup would act as the yearly annual training (AT) for all the participating MFR units and would use allocated funding for this exercise. Don't freak out, we can also keep sending units to ITX.
- **Recognition and Knowledge Sharing:** At the end of the exercise, the winning unit would be awarded the Commander's Cup, with its name engraved on the trophy. More importantly, after action reviews would be compiled into lessons learned and shared across the MFR.

Additionally, top-performing leaders could be given priority for key billets or professional military education opportunities, reinforcing the competitive element and career development benefits.

## Capabilities & Skills Gained

While logistical and budgetary concerns are inevitable, we must move beyond *we don't have money for that* and instead focus on creative solutions to enhance our combat readiness. The Red Diamond Maneuver Cup would cultivate the following:

### Adaptability

We cannot predict where or how the next war will be fought. However, by developing adaptability within all Marines and our units, we ensure readiness for any situation. Operating in unpredictable, chaotic environments will teach Marines to respond to evolving threats in real-time.

### Creativity

To win on the battlefield, we must embrace creative problem-solving. In *Winning Westeros: How Game of Thrones Explains Modern Military Conflict*, one key lesson stands out: "Fostering a disciplined independence will result in necessary, creative, innovative, or even outlandish ideas." Restricting actions and ideas stifles this innovation. These exercises will cultivate the "military scientist" mindset, encouraging tactical ingenuity over rigid adherence to doctrine.

### Leadership Development

This exercise would be the ultimate test of leadership. No Marine can hide in a force-on-force exercise. From the

battalion commander down to the fire-team leader, everyone would be challenged. This competition would:

- Reveal strengths and weaknesses in leadership.
- Provide hands-on experience in issuing mission-type orders, conducting tactical resupplies, and operating in a sustained, contested environment.
- Foster a bias for action—developing leaders who think, adapt, and make decisions under pressure.

## Conclusion

GEN George C. Marshall, reflecting on the Louisiana Maneuvers, stated: "I want the mistakes made down in Louisiana, not over in Europe, and the only way to do this thing is to try it out, and if it doesn't work, find out what we need to make it work." This philosophy should guide us in preparing for the future fight.

Failure in training must be an invitation to learn, not a cause for punishment. The Red Diamond Maneuver Cup is the ultimate tool to prepare MFR for the next war—through true competition, innovation, and leadership development. The future fight is coming. Are we training for it, or are we training for the last war? The time to implement the *Red Diamond Maneuver Cup* is now. *Fight's On!*

