

The Tactical MAGTF Integration Course

A battalion staff training planned approach

by Maj James R.R. Smith & Chris D. deVries & Capt Gene A. Harb

The Operations and Tactic Instructors (OTI) and Intelligence and Tactics Instructor (ITI) Courses administered by Marine Corps Tactical Operations Group (MCTOG) train Marines to lead staff planning for tactical operations. This two-month crash course in the conduct and execution of the Marine Corps Planning Process is an opportunity for officers and chiefs in the key operations and intelligence billets to take some “sets and reps” in a consequence free environment. The Tactical MAGTF Integration Course produces officers and SNCOs comfortable with manipulating the planning process for tactical value.

The greatest beneficiary of the TMIC course is the battalion commander who sent the Marine to the course. TMIC prepares Marines to train a staff with shared understanding of the environment and adversary in order to shrink the commander’s decision-making cycle. During the course, individual students learn a great deal from the staff, the exercises, and each other. This learning can have its most profound effect if the battalion commanders employs OTI and ITI graduates to facilitate training once graduates return to their parent unit. This requires battalion commanders to prioritize battalion staff battle training. Dedicating “Mental Mondays” or “Tactical Tuesdays” with a four-hour training block may seem like a monumental sacrifice, but consistent staff training in the execution intelligence preparation of the battlefield, problem framing, and course of action development can turn these cumbersome events into staff battle drills that reduce

>Maj Smith is an Assault Amphibian Officer and Latin American FAO. He has deployed in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and the 31st MEU. He currently serves in 3d MarDiv.

>>Maj deVries is an Infantry Officer. He has deployed with 1st Bn, 4th Marines; 3d Bn, 1st Marines, and previously served with Marine Security Force Battalion, Bangor, WA. He is currently the Assistant Battalion Inspector Instructor and Operations Officer at 1st Bn, 25th Marine Regiment.

>>>Capt Harb is an Infantry Officer. He previously served with 1st Bn, 3d Marines. He is currently the Mountain Operations OIC at the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

friction at integrated training exercise, MEU certification exercise, Marine Corps Combat Readiness Exercise, and real-world missions.

TMIC’s contribution to the fleet is preparing Marines to conduct unit-level

training through intellectual wargame exercises. Basic and analog in nature, the tactical decision games and *Kriegsspiels* (German for “wargame”) which TMIC utilize are simple and effective training tools to coalesce a staff into an effective



Wargame exercises are effective training tools that can help staff coordination. (Photo by LCpl Jacob Wilson.)



Sending officers or Marines to TMIC can benefit the battalion during live fire or force-on-force training. (Photo by MGySgt Jamie P. Myers.)

team. Maps, acetate, a scenario, and three to four hours are all it takes to effectively exercise the collective mental muscle of a battalion. Battalion commanders struggle to find staff training time because of competing home station requirements, administrative tasks, limited field time, and restricted training resources. TMIC graduates offer a solution. Battalion PME's (when they do happen) are traditionally historical or career focused discussions. OTI and ITI trained Marines provide a more fruitful PME option.

Kriegsspiels provide a force-on-force training environment without expensive simulation systems or complex training support requests. Battalions must leverage these training tools to answer the Commandant's requirement for more dynamic and interactive training. OTI and ITI graduates can provide training value for battalion staffs without the requirements for training areas, range safety officers, or subordinate Marine units as maneuver elements. Utilized effectively, OTI and ITI-led training events can gather and train battalion leadership while simultaneously giving time back to the Marines to conduct small unit leader actions.

Commanders at the battalion level must send officers and SNCOs to the TMIC course and then prioritize battalion staff training when they return. Allowing a key billet holder to attend

a six- to eight-week course is a sacrifice battalion commanders must be willing to accept. Executing the course in conjunction with PCS orders is ideal, but commanders should prioritize sending Marines in their first twelve months with a command because the return on investment cannot be overstated. Sending post-company command captains before they fleet up to an operations

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officer billet will effectively bridge the experience gap between platoon employment and battalion tactics and is a perfect time to send a seasoned captain to TMIC.

Training a battalion staff to function and operate as a unit is difficult and cumbersome but is the responsibility of the commander. OTIs and ITIs can help. Battalion-level billets are in constant flux and the requirements of daily staff work (meetings, emails, dental readiness reports, Global Combat Support Systems-Marine Corps, Department of Defense Readiness Reporting System, and Marine Corps Training In-

formation Management System reports) can all seem more immediately pressing. It is the commander's responsibility to set priorities and allocate training time accordingly. It becomes far too easy for a battalion staff to focus on facilitating and overseeing company and platoon tactical training and neglect the collective battalion functions. The trigger pulling actions of squads are easy to quantify on a training slide and Marines are comfortable with this training continuum because we have done it since basic training. But battalions and regiments are tactical elements too. Every level of command must be proficient at tactics. Providing Marines the opportunity to think creatively about tactical problems, develop a tactical solution, and test it against a reacting enemy is critical to an individual's and unit's development.

The commanders who leverage the existing training assets available via TMIC Course graduates will have a better-trained battalion staff and send better-trained individuals onward to other Marine units. Commanders who effectively train their staffs are taking care of the junior Marines who will execute the battalion's plan. They

are taking care of the Marine Corps by preparing staff officers and SNCOs to function in the dynamic planning environment. They are also setting the conditions in training to win in conflict. Commanders must prioritize attendance at TMIC and utilize the skills acquired in the course to better their battalions and the Marine Corps.

>Authors' Note: Maj Smith, Maj deVries, and Capt Harb recently completed TMIC 2-19 under the guidance of faculty advisor Maj Collings.



“Damn the Torpedoes”

A rebuttal

by Maj Jacob H. Wilde

In reading LtCol G. Stephen Lauer’s article “Damn the Torpedoes,” (*MCG*, Feb19) I struggled to understand how it was possible for a retired Marine infantry officer and current School of Advanced Military Studies professor to write an article supporting the basic tenets of attrition warfare. Such an article would have been completely at home in the *Gazette* during the mid-1980s with the debates surrounding the Marine Corps’ adoption of maneuver warfare doctrine, but that such antiquated thinking and assumptions about the character of war still exist in the mind of *any* military professional—to say nothing of one entrusted with the development of our future strategic thinkers—is both baffling and troubling.

LtCol Lauer states that the purpose of his article is to “demonstrate the

>Maj Wilde is a Combat Engineer Officer and currently a student at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College.

extraordinary departure of the current *Marine Corps Operating Concept* from the traditional assumptions of amphibious operations.”¹ Missing from this purpose is a recognition that in an ever-changing operational environment, military thinkers must continually question and reassess those traditional assumptions, and accept that they may no longer be valid. Throughout history, various developments periodically conspired to force a complete shift in the manner in which wars were fought. Whether one calls them “military revolutions,” “generations of war,” or some

other label for classification, the fact remains that each brought a paradigm shift in the baseline assumptions and conceptualization of war. Those organizations willing and able to adapt to the new paradigm won and survived. Those unable or unwilling to adapt did not. The recognition that the character of war is in the midst of another paradigm shift is absolutely necessary if the United States is to retain its place in the world and succeed in its future engagements.

To defend his position, LtCol Lauer builds his argument on several indefensible assumptions. In the exposition of his first point, he argues that the British failed at Gallipoli because “the landing force lacked the land superiority to win decisively against numerically superior military forces of the Ottoman Empire.”² A careful study of the failures at Gallipoli reveals that the relative lack of combat power was far from the decisive factor in the failed contest for Gallipoli. In fact, Lieutenant General Stopford enjoyed a *ten-to-one* local numerical superiority for two full days at Suvla Bay.³ Had he attacked aggressively with the force he had, there is little question that he could have cut the peninsula in two and established a foothold to expand the lodgment ashore. Rather than an underwhelming force strength, it was weak and unimaginative leadership and a failure to press the attack inland that brought the Gallipoli campaign to its disastrous end.

The author derides the Ellis Group’s emphasis on expanding the concept of combined arms integration to include information and cyber warfare, calling it a

turn from decisive maneuver to a multi-domain and philosophical view



The operational environment is ever-changing. (Photo by Sgt Victor Mancilla.)



We must understand the full strength of the MAGTF. (Photo by LCpl Nathaniel Hamilton.)

of warfare that elevates the ephemeral over the tangible, the cognitive over the physical, disruption over destruction.⁴

Certainly, the author is aware that the Marine Corps' foundational doctrine, *MCDP 1, Warfighting*, repeatedly refers to both itself and maneuver warfare as philosophies. Further, a significant number of notable military commanders and theorists have noted and extolled the relevance of the intangible arenas of war as being decisive. LtGen A. A.

every capability available—to destroy the enemy's will to fight.

Regarding his assertion that the Marine Corps departed from a doctrine of air, sea, and land superiority and turned toward an emphasis on positional advantage to destroy or disrupt the enemy's cohesion as late as 2014, indicates a complete ignorance of the development of the Marine Corps' post-Vietnam doctrine.⁶ In his book, *A New Conception of War*, Maj Ian Brown explores the debates surrounding the

The solution to this mismatch rested on a concept of mobility, maneuver, and high operating tempo in order to disrupt or destroy the enemy force's ability to operate as a cohesive whole and enable its piecemeal destruction or incite its surrender.

Vandegrift stated, "Positions are seldom lost because they have been destroyed, but almost invariably because the leader has decided in *his own mind* that the position cannot be held."⁵ Similarly, Napoleon's oft-quoted belief that "Moral is to the physical as three is to one," further attests to the decisive nature of seeking victory in the moral and mental realms of human conflict—using

adoption of maneuver warfare, which initially centered on how the Marine Corps could contribute to a NATO fight against the Soviet Union.⁷ In such a fight it was assumed that as an amphibious force, the Marine Corps would be outnumbered, out-gunned, and out-armored. The solution to this mismatch rested on a concept of mobility, maneuver, and high operating

tempo in order to disrupt or destroy the enemy force's ability to operate as a cohesive whole and enable its piecemeal destruction or incite its surrender. To suggest that this doctrinal concept did not emerge until 2014 is simply incorrect.

The idea that "the infantry *is* the Marine Corps" demonstrates an apparent misunderstanding of the true strength of the MAGTF and the fundamental purpose of combined arms integration.⁸ It further demonstrates a failure to recognize the changing character of war and that a more nuanced view of combined arms integration is absolutely necessary for success. Capabilities such as information, cyber, legal, and economic warfare can certainly be employed with significant effect to undermine or destroy an opponent's center of gravity and erode his ability and will to fight. Nowhere in his article does the author address the possibility that the weapons and capabilities available to America's near-peer opponents might prevent a landing force from even arriving at the operational area intact and retaining some modicum of surprise. The author's conclusion that, "The Marine Corps has acquiesced into the sliding loss of its naval character and the irrelevance of any naval roots," when the *MOC* clearly identifies the integration of the naval force as one of its five critical tasks is also baffling.⁹

Lastly, the author fails to clarify the conditions under which a massive amphibious operation might be employed as he describes. What strategic objective would it seek to accomplish? What use is a massed ground combat force against an enemy whose warfighting ethos is based in Sun Tzu and Mao Zedong—a lesson the U.S. failed to learn in Vietnam? Would the U.S. potentially seek the complete overthrow of a near-peer state, or is it more likely that the amphibious force might be used for more limited objectives, such as deterring or countering actions that threaten regional stability or the interests of the U.S. and regional partners? Without ties to strategic assumptions or objectives, such a concept exists solely for its own benefit—a product of what Chuck Spinney refers to as "incestuous ampli-



UAS systems can provide updates and improve situational awareness. (Photo by PFC Skylar M. Harris.)

fication”—and is dangerously detached from reality.¹⁰

What LtCol Lauer essentially advocates is a return to the “glory days” of World War II: The days when large forces of aggressive and disciplined Marines and Soldiers charged the beaches and wrestled terrain from the enemy by raw mass and firepower—and died by the thousands doing so. At a time when 71 percent of American youth are ineligible for military service of any kind, the prospect of wasting the lives of the narrow band of young people that are both willing and able to serve is unconscionable and self-defeating.¹¹ Furthermore, the assumption of fighting on enemy soil far from home automatically limits the U.S.’ ability to introduce a numerically superior force ashore, particularly in an environment of contested sea and air control. The proliferation of sensors, unmanned vehicles, and other emerging technologies means that the U.S.’ reliance on the “few and exquisite” platforms required to support the author’s conception of amphibious war falls flat against competitors arming themselves with “small, many, and smart” platforms that sidestep American strengths and exploit its vulnerabilities.¹² Not only is the cost imposition upon the United States in such an engagement wholly un-

portable, but the unacceptable risk for which the author denigrates the *MOC* is significantly greater under his own operational conception.

Ultimately, the author builds his argument on an outdated conceptual framework and a set of assumptions about maritime operations that fails

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to recognize the changing character of war. It does not address the threats that emerging technologies and methods pose to American forces, capabilities, and interests. It further fails to recognize the capabilities that those same emerging technologies provide to U.S. forces as a means of exploiting maneuver and combined arms integration in new domains beyond the traditional land, sea, and air of the physical realm. This is dangerously regressive thinking.

Drawing upon history is only valuable if the correct lessons are learned, and improvements at fighting the last war do nothing to improve the chances of victory on a wholly new and different battlefield.

Notes

1. G. Stephen Lauer, “Damn the Torpedoes: The Marine Operating Concept and the Failure of Decisive Maneuver from the Sea in the 21st Century,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: February 2009).
2. *Ibid.*
3. Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War*, (New York, NY: Free Press, 1990).
4. “Damn the Torpedoes.”
5. Alexander A. Vandegrift, *Battle Doctrine for Front Line Leaders*, (Quantico, VA: U.S. Marine Corps Education Center, 1981).
6. “Damn the Torpedoes.”
7. Ian Brown, *A New Conception of War*, (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2018).
8. “Damn the Torpedoes.”
9. *Ibid.*
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11. Heather Maxey, Sandra Bishop-Josef, and Ben Goodman, *Unhealthy and Unprepared: National Security Depends on Promoting Healthy Lifestyles from an Early Age*, (Washington, DC: Council for a Strong America, October 2018).
12. T.X. Hammes, “The Future of Warfare: Small, Many, Smart vs. Few & Exquisite?,” *War on the Rocks*, (Online: July 2014).

