

# The War Academy

Evolving the field grade warrior

by Capt Gene A. Harb

**W**orld War I made it abundantly clear that the German military had a gap. They had been training for the wars of the nineteenth century, making them wholly unprepared for the adversaries they faced. In the inter-war period, however, they addressed this vulnerability by restructuring and reinvigorating their professional military education program. By the beginning of World War II, the German military was a modern, aggressive, tactically proficient, and well-disciplined warfighting machine. A central component of German officer training was a reinvented version of the Prussian *Kriegsacademie*, or War Academy, which honed each officer's ability to lead battle maneuvers.

Today, the United States Marine Corps has a similar gap: we too are still training for yesterday's wars. We devote considerable education and training to preparing tactical warfighters at the squad, platoon, and company level. From the advanced infantry course to Infantry Officer Course and Infantry Unit Leader's Course, we educate and train our small unit leaders in the tactics they will need to defeat our Nation's adversaries at the squad to company level. In our company and field grade PME courses, such as Expeditionary Warfare School and at Command and Staff College, we focus heavily on the Marine Corps Planning Process (MCPP) and operational- and strategic-level conceptual understanding of the Marine Corps and the joint force. This is a logical and important step to developing educated and professional career military officers and should be sustained in these schools. However, as we are currently structured, we are not developing world-class tacticians to lead the fight at the battalion and regimental levels. This

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is a critical problem because the current tactical environment is evolving; it involves multiple domains—including nontraditional spaces like information and cyberspace—and may involve near-peer adversaries with the capability and capacity to dominate our forces when given the opportunity.

The Tactical MAGTF Integration Course (TMIC) at the Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group (MCTOG), which produces operations and tactics instructors, is an excellent course that attempts to address this shortcoming. It is staffed with some of the most experienced and dedicated instructors in the Corps, but it is not meeting the need to develop battalion and

regimental tactical warfighters who can fight, adapt, and win in ground combat against our Nation's adversaries. This course must evolve from an EWS Part 2 MCPP seminar to a premier tactics-focused academy that trains field grade leadership to fight and win against peer adversary combat forces in the dynamic environments that we expect to face in the coming decades. I challenge the MCTOG and the Marine Corps to replace the current curriculum, consisting of three deliberate MCPP reps in standard scenarios, with a fast-paced and adversary-focused tactical curriculum. The revised program should deliver dozens of hasty planning and execution events against our identified adversaries in applicable real-world, force-on-force scenarios, incorporating the technologies and mission sets the Marine Corps can expect on future battlefields. MCTOG's War Academy must become the tactical version of School of Advanced Warfighting/School of Advanced Mili-



**We must do more than just train battalion operations officers.** (Photo by Cpl Dallas Johnson.)

tary Studies and focus on training joint Service field grade leaders in state-of-the-art tactical decision making to win battles—battles, not engagements or campaigns.

**The Process**

As Sun Tzu said, “If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.”

I propose a six-part curriculum with three concurrent lines of effort: adversary tactics and capabilities, hasty tactical planning, and the future warfare environment.

*Part 1: Tactics in Context.* This part is not an *MCDP 1-3, Tactics*, (Washington, DC: HQMC, 1997), discussion group. Every student should already be familiar with those publications and

evolved over time. The remaining four days will each consist of a force-on-force *kriegspiel*—or wargame—consisting of a four-hour planning block followed by a transition brief and mission execution. Each four-person student team, consisting of a maneuver officer and chief and an intelligence officer and chief, will conduct one offensive and defensive operation as a Marine Corps battalion and one each as an adversary force. MCTOG’s excellent adversary forces branch will provide advisors to the adversary teams to ensure a deeper understanding of the adversaries’ tactics and capabilities.

Part 2: Russia will incorporate the concepts of hybrid war into the *kriegspiels* and planning scenarios, recognizing the impacts of special opera-

While not the current primary national security threat, these are still tasks that we must prepare our field grade leaders to execute.

*Part 6: Tactics Instructor.* School of Advanced Warfighting/School of Advanced Military Studies strives to build MAGTF planners who can return to the Operating Forces and Supporting Establishment and provide training and mentorship. In a similar way, War Academy graduates must be expected to return to the fleet and share their tactical knowledge through instruction and facilitating tactical decision events such as *kriegspiels*. To be effective, these instructors should receive formalized instruction on how to run a *kriegspiel* director’s table, adjudicate engagements, facilitate group discussions, and lead debriefs. More than just producing educated tactical warriors, the War Academy must create highly skilled individuals who can train the greater force.

The Marine Corps prides itself on being the best tactical warfighting organization in the world, but we are currently neglecting to prepare our field grade warfighters for the tactical challenges their units will face on the contemporary battlefield. There is a lack of understanding of adversary tactical doctrine and force capabilities, as well as an understanding of the tactics required to fight in a hybrid and continually-contested environment. The Marine Corps must address this vulnerability by developing innovative and lethal field grade leaders through a practical, comprehensive, forward-thinking, and tactically-focused TMIC curriculum. The Kriegs Academy should not be (as TMIC currently is) a battalion operations officer prep course. It should exist to produce field grade warfighters: tactically proficient battalion and regimental commanders. Throughout history, Marines have led the joint force in tactical innovation and proficiency. We must lead again now to confront the new battlespace evolution. It is time we built a Kriegs Academy.

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their tenets. Part 1 is a six-day intensive focus on offensive and defensive actions at the battalion and regimental level. This week will consist of in-depth studies in the types of actions and forms of maneuver and be integrated with battle studies to provide historical context and analysis of leader’s decisions. While the Marine Corps tactical tenets should be used to frame our historical battle analysis, battle studies should include relevant examples throughout history.

*Parts 2-4: Russia, China, and North Korea.* Parts 2 through 4 will focus on fighting our adversaries as identified in the National Defense Strategy: Russia, China, and North Korea. Each part will consist of a six-day week with a roughly consistent structure. Days one and two will consist of a deep analysis of the adversary’s tactical warfighting doctrine, force structure, weapons and equipment capabilities, and historical case studies of how that force has fought and

tions forces, unconventional warfare, and information fires on the combat environment.

Part 3: China will incorporate the concepts of contested domains, requiring students to protect and maneuver their forces in a contested air and electronic warfare environment.

Part 4: North Korea will expose students to the challenges of operating in a chemical environment and against extensive underground defensive facilities. Formal classes on these topics will be incorporated into each part.

*Part 5: Violent Extremist Organizations and Non-standard Operations.* This part, following a regimen similar to Parts 2 through 4, will focus on the structure and warfighting tenets of violent extremist organizations and the conduct of other operations the Marine Corps is often tasked to conduct. Examples include security operations and noncombatant evacuation operations.

