

# A Case Study of Tactical Evolution

reviewed by Capt Timothy J. Jackson

**STORM TROOP TACTICS: Innovation in the German Army 1914-1918.** By Capt Bruce I. Gudmundsson, USMCR. Praeger Publishers, New York, 1989, 212 pp., \$39.95. (Member \$35.95)

*Storm Troop Tactics* is a historical study of German tactical development during World War I. Bruce Gudmundsson had two goals in mind when he wrote the book. First, he wanted to contribute to the historical study of German World War I tactics begun by Capt G. C. Wynne in 1939 in *If Germany Attacks* and continued by Capt Tim Lupfer in 1981 in *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War*. Gudmundsson does this well, particularly in his examination of the development of storm troop assault tactics at the small unit level.

Gudmundsson's second goal was practical—to provide serving officers with a book that might provoke ideas useful in the preparation for future combat. In this light, I think his book has three themes important to the Marine Corps today.

First, *Storm Troop Tactics* will contribute significantly to Marines' understanding of maneuver warfare tactics. German tactical development during World War I was a watershed in modern warfare. The transition from the massed, close order tactics of the

19th century to tactics extended both in width and depth was revolutionary. Most modern students of war believe the German blitzkrieg of 1939-1941 was rooted in the infiltration tactics adopted late in World War I. Based on my own research, I believe modern infantry tactics are also based on the German defense in depth and infiltration attack. I wonder why The Basic School taught me the on-line assault and forward slope defense in 1982; both failed miserably in 1914.



Second, German tactical development occurred because the German Army was institutionally flexible and open to change, at least in wartime. The Germans were able to adapt because they had a dynamic, self-educating officer corps that felt "Germany's fate depended directly upon their tactical competence." In contrast, Gudmundsson generalizes that the French felt they always had the formula for success (they didn't), and the British never seriously studied the problem.

One generally accepted truism is that future combat will demand changes that we cannot possibly predict. I think it was Gen Balck who said "bullets quickly rewrite tactics." This is an important consideration for Marines today. The Germans were capable of adapting to the changing demands of the battlefield—are we?

Third, Gudmundsson points out that German World War I tactical excellence was in vain because the Germans followed a flawed strategy. This, the main theme of his book, highlights another important principle: the higher level of war dominates the lower. Mere good tactics do not necessarily achieve strategic victory. Most Marines view the 1st Marine Division's retreat from the Chosin Reservoir in December 1950 as a heroic battle (which it was). But it was also one battle in a U.S. operational-level defeat at the hands of the Chinese. Although in combat Marines seldom concern themselves with strategic policy and objectives, understanding that the higher level of war dominates the lower may help us understand why what appears to be a victory (Tet 1969) is sometimes really a defeat.

This book is less than 200 pages and can be read easily in several evenings. It is well written and historically interesting. Most important, it is difficult for Marines to understand the new *FMFM I Warfighting* and the philosophy it represents without understanding the revolution in tactics that took place in the German Army in World War I.

USMC

>Capt Jackson is currently serving as course developer of the Marine Corps Institute's *Warfighting Skills Program*.

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## Seven Books for Marines

by Robert D. Steele

I noted with interest the three excellent books approved by the Commandant for general officer reading (*MCG*, Dec88, p. 6) and the reading list for all Marines in ALMAR 127/89 (*MCG*, Sep89). Taking a slightly different tack, which goes beyond military strategy into the realms of grand strategy and the civilian-military relationship that is so critical to force structure, funding and procurement, and employment, following are six other books

I would recommend to any Marine officer, and particularly to general officers:

**THE DEFENSE MATRIX: National Preparedness and Military-Industrial Complex.** By Gen James P. Mullins. Avant Press, San Marcos, CA, 1986, 160 pp., Out of Print.

Clear-cut critique of the systems procurement process, emphasizing the

importance of *military* "requirements analysis" rather than simply buying the "bigger better bang" emerging from contractor internal research and development. Points out consistent lack of prior coordination with logisticians (and by extension, C4I<sup>2</sup> folks), which results in systems that are unreliable, not sustainable, and not employable (i.e., a big bang that can't get timely and accurate targeting intelligence isn't going to have much effect). Good comments on setting priorities, shortening procurement curve, and encouraging innovation, stressing affordability.

**THE RING OF POWER: The White House and Its Expanding Role in Government.** By Bradley H. Patterson, Jr. Basic, 1988, 320 pp., \$19.95. (Member \$17.95)

Excellent descriptive and explanatory work on all the elements of the White House Staff (including the National Security Council Staff). Makes the point that U.S. military forces (read expeditionary forces) are destined to always be micromanaged from the White House operating in a crisis mode, and explains domestic political considerations and C<sup>3</sup> equipment already installed that make direct dialog between the President and the lead rifleman "politically imperative."

**THINKING IN TIME: The Uses of History for Decision Makers.** By Richard E. Neustadt & Ernest R. May. The Free Press, New York, 1986, 350 pp., \$19.95 hardback, \$9.95 paperback. (Member 17.95, \$8.95)

Systematically outlines the way personal and professional experiences form each decisionmaker's framework for viewing the world and provides

useful insights into how a decision-maker should inspect an issue's history; probe presumptions; place strangers, barriers, and organizations; and note patterns. Uses many military crises and related decisionmakers to illustrate points.

**BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS & FOREIGN POLICY.** By Morton H. Halperin. The Brookings Institute, Washington, DC, 1974, 340 pp., \$12.95. (Member \$11.65)

Bluntly lays out the "rules of the game" for White House decisionmaking, rules that include *deceiving the President*. No one can presume to sit in judgment on LtCol Oliver North without having read this book.

**THE KNOWLEDGE EXECUTIVE: Leadership in an Information Society.** By Harlan Cleveland. Truman Talley Books/E.P. Dutton, New York, 1985, 288 pp., \$10.95. (Member \$9.85)

The single best book I've encountered to orient senior officers who instinctively distrust computers on why they are wrong. Discusses the integration of effort and information, the crit-

ical value of being able to cross agency and Service boundaries, the importance of access to open source information, the value of off-the-shelf information technology. Bottom line: our leaders must change their mindsets and become knowledge mentors instead of turf-conscious micromanagers.

**GREAT DECISIONS 1988: Foreign Policy Issues Facing the Nation.** By Foreign Policy Association Staff. Foreign Policy Association, New York, 1988, 96 pp., \$8.00. (Member \$7.20)


The simplest, shortest, and most professional examination of key foreign policy issues of high relevance to Marine Corps leaders. This year's publication covers the projection of U.S. influence (alone worth the price), Mexico and the United States, trade & global markets, Gorbachev's Soviet Union, Middle East options, global environment, South Korean democracy, and Western Europe & INF.

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