

INTRODUCTION TO SMALL UNIT DOCTRINE

Fundamentals of the Small Unit

The CAROLINA FREE PRESS
September/October, 1998 Volume IV Issue 5

Compiled from a number of military manuals, this is the first in what is hoped to be a series of articles pertaining to Small Unit or cell operations. These articles are designed to assist leaders and prospective leaders of the small unit. The content will be tactical and logistical; administrative matters have been omitted. When in the field, especially under stress of combat or simulated combat, combat leaders cannot instantly recall everything they have been taught. Rapid changes in the situation may cause a leader to assume a position for which they have not yet been trained. They will then appreciate some brief reference material to guide them. They cannot carry masses of field manuals and they will lack access to a library or organizational files. What they need they must carry in their pocket, condensed in a form, which allows use at-a-glance. These articles have been compiled from current field manuals and field circulars with those requirements in mind.

You will note that much of the reference material is in fact a comprehensive checklist to ensure that you have not overlooked some important consideration in leading a small unit. The series will focus on unit combat operations and soldier combat skills.

Fundamental to operating across the full range of possible operations is an understanding of the military's doctrinal foundations, the principles of war and the tenets of military operations. Small Unit leaders must understand the concepts and fundamentals of military doctrine to effectively lead in combat.

Principles of War

The enduring bedrock of military doctrine, the principles of war, have stood the test of time. Only slightly revised since first published in 1921, today's force projection military recognizes the following nine principles of war.

1. Objective

Direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective. The ultimate military purpose of war is the destruction of the enemy's armed forces and its' will to fight. In operations other than war, the ultimate objective might be more difficult to define, but must be clear from the beginning.

2. Offensive

Seize, retain, and exploit the initiative. Offensive action is the most effective and decisive way to attain a clearly defined common objective. In militia operations it is important to note that the militia is defensive in nature and should not initiate offensive action unless in time of war and within parameters consistent with lawful militia operations.

3. Mass

Mass the effects of overwhelming combat power at a decisive place and time. Synchronizing all the elements of combat power where they will have decisive effect on an enemy force in a short period of time is to achieve mass.

4. Economy of Force

Economy of force is the judicious employment and distribution of forces in order to achieve mass elsewhere. Allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts.

5. Maneuver

Place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power. Maneuver is the movement of forces in relation to the enemy to secure or retain positional advantage.

6. Unity of Command

For every objective, seek unity of command and unity of effort. At all levels of war, employment of forces in a manner that masses combat power toward a common objective requires unity of command and unity of effort.

7. Security

Never permit the enemy to acquire unexpected advantage. Security results from the measures taken by a commander to protect his forces.

8. Surprise

Strike the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which it is unprepared. The element of surprise can allow forces to achieve success well out of proportion to the effort expended.

9. Simplicity

Prepare clear, uncomplicated plans and concise orders to ensure thorough understanding. Other factors being equal, the simplest plan is preferable.

Tenets

Success in battle will depend on the ability to fight in accordance with five basic tenets as follows:

1. Initiative

Initiative means setting or changing the terms of battle by action. The small unit must attempt to maintain their freedom of action while limiting the enemy's. This requires an offensive spirit in all operations. Decentralized operations in which small units aggressively fight through enemy resistance with immediately available resources support the seizure or retention of the initiative. Individuals act independently within the framework of the commander's concept. Leaders and soldiers must understand the intent of commanders two echelons above. Commanders use mission type orders and clear, concise instructions to ensure that subordinates understand the concept and how they fit within it.

2. Agility

Infantry forces seize or retain the initiative by acting and/or reacting faster than the enemy. This begins with the commander, who must have the mental agility to rapidly analyze tactical situations, thinking through many possible courses of action and the enemy's likely reaction to them, and determining the most effective and least costly course. SOPs and drills enable the unit to rapidly execute assigned missions without long, detailed orders.

3. Depth

Depth is the extension of operations in time, space, and resources. A commander seeks to fight the enemy throughout the depth of the enemy's formations by properly positioning his forces or by skillfully maneuvering his unit. This allows the unit to seek out and concentrate against enemy weakness. By swiftly concentrating against first one, then another enemy weakness, a skilled commander can begin to seize the initiative on a local level, allowing for command to then exploit the opportunity.

4. Synchronization

Synchronization is the arrangement of battlefield activities in time, space, and purpose to produce maximum combat power at the decisive point. A commander synchronizes his subordinates' actions on the battlefield by assigning clear missions, making understood the timing required in the operation, and focusing all actions towards achieving overwhelming combat power at a decisive point. Issuing mission orders, identifying the main effort, and assigning each subordinate element

clear tasks and purposes are the best means of maintaining synchronization in a fast paced, fluid environment.

5. Versatility

Versatility is the ability of tactical units to adapt to different missions and tasks. In a force projection military, the demands for versatility increase. Forces must be prepared to move rapidly from one region to another, one type of warfare to another, and one form of combat to another.

Combat Power

Military forces seek to apply overwhelming combat power in order to achieve victory at minimal cost. Four primary elements: maneuver, firepower, protection, and leadership, are used in combination to create combat power.

1. Maneuver

Maneuver is the movement of forces supported by fire to achieve a position of advantage from which to destroy or threaten destruction of the enemy. Maneuver is the primary means of gaining or retaining the initiative. Forces use stealth, camouflage, dispersion, terrain, and fires to support their movement and close with the enemy. Infantry takes advantage of its ability to move across difficult terrain in any weather to surprise the enemy. The indirect approach guides movement planning: avoiding the enemy's strengths, moving through gaps or weaknesses or around its flanks, and striking at critical locations to rapidly destroy the enemy's will and ability to fight.

2. Firepower

Firepower is the capacity to deliver effective fire on a target. Firepower and maneuver are complimentary. It is the effect of fire on the enemy that matters. A few weapons firing accurately from a location that surprise the enemy is more effective than many weapons with a large volume of fire but without the element of surprise. Before attempting to maneuver, infantry units must establish a base of fire. Leaders must understand the capabilities of organic and supporting weapons, how to position and employ them, and the techniques of integrating and controlling fires.

3. Protection

Protection is the conservation of the fighting potential of the force. It includes all actions that degrade the enemy's ability to maneuver against or place fires on the friendly force. These include security measures; use of limited visibility, cover, and concealment; air defense; camouflage; and dispersion. Protection also includes maintaining the soldiers' health and morale. Maneuver provides protection for the force by preventing the enemy from fixing it and concentrating firepower, such as suppressive fire during an assault, can also provide protection. Infantry gains protection by avoiding detection during movement and by digging fighting positions when stationary.

4. Leadership

The combat power generated by infantry forces is dependent on the concepts and plans developed by the commanders and the subordinate leaders. Infantry leaders are expected to lead by personal example and to provide purpose, motivation, and direction for their soldiers. Leaders must know their profession, their soldiers, and the tools of war.

Basic Rules of Combat

These rules appeared in military doctrine for a short time but are no longer included in recent publications. At the small unit level, however, they encompass the essence of the above fundamentals.

Security

- Use cover and concealment
- Establish local security and conduct reconnaissance
- Protect the unit

Movement

- Establish a moving element
- Get in the best position to shoot

- Gain and maintain the initiative
 - Move fast, strike hard, and finish rapidly
- Shoot
- Establish a base of fire
 - Maintain mutual support
 - Kill or suppress the enemy
 - Communicate
- Communication
- Tell soldiers what is expected
 - Sustain the team
 - Keep the fight going
 - Take care of soldiers

Some of the information contained within this document may not be specifically applicable to potential militia operations. It is still important to understand this doctrine because it is the basis for military operations throughout the world. In upcoming issues we hope to include articles on Command and Control, Movement, Offense, and Defense as well as several other topics.

“The Soviet and Chinese examples illustrate contrasting methods of ruling a people against its will. On the one hand, a constant official terror, suppressing rebellion before it has taken root. On the other hand, a nation-wide mobilization of the techniques of persuasion and propaganda, designed to make all sections of the people participate, apparently of their own free will, in the revolution. But the two major Communist systems have this in common: when terror or persuasion has failed and an insurrection nevertheless breaks out, it must be ruthlessly and violently crushed.” *The Rebels: A Study of Post-War Insurrections*, Brian Crozier, 1960.

END