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28 MARCH 1975

UNIT LEADERSHIP ON THE NUCLEAR BATTLEFIELD

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JERALD A. MORTENSEN
AIR DEFENSE

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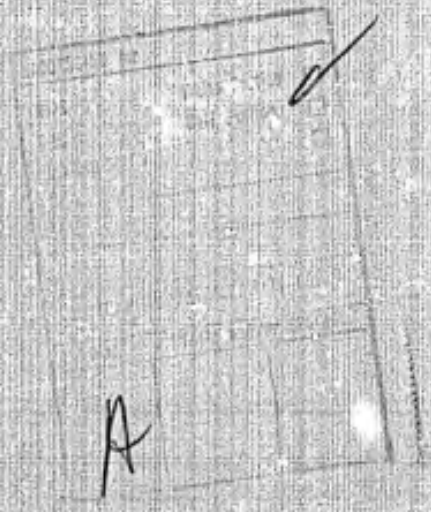
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(6) UNIT LEADERSHIP ON THE NUCLEAR BATTLEFIELD.

by

(10) Lieutenant ~~Colonel~~ Jerald A. Mortensen
~~Air Defense~~

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The basic question is how the unit commander can operate in a nuclear atmosphere and how this differs from the conventional atmosphere. A literary search was conducted in order to develop authoritive opinions on the nature and purpose of leadership and nuclear tactics, this was limited to command at battalion and lower. The information developed was considered in view of training the individual soldier, nuclear tactics and feasibility of operations, and mission accomplishment. It was concluded that unit commanders can operate on the nuclear battlefield by use of intelligent training and flexible adaptation to changing situations.

We are about to enter into an arena where we will not be able to relate to or draw on past experiences. No nation or people have gone into combat on a nuclear battlefield. The Japanese have suffered from nuclear devastation but their armed forces did not conduct operations on a nuclear battelfield.

Thinking about the unthinkable is going to be necessary.[1] That is, we are going to have to develop the knowledge and skills that are necessary to survive on a nuclear battlefield. Our unit commanders are going to have to prepare themselves and their troops for operations in the nuclear environment.

Probably the greatest problem area a leader will be facing will be the psychological and physiological training problem. How are we going to prepare our troops mentally to function in this unknown arena? Man's greatest fear is fear of the unknown. In the past, a significant number of senior officers and NCO's had served in combat similar to that for which they were training their men. How do we as leaders prepare our troops to operate in a area that is unknown, even to ourselves? What type of physical endurance and attributes do we need to develop in our troops? It has been proven that the physically fit are less susceptible to fear and sickness than the physically unfit. It is going to be necessary for the unit commander to develop realistic training conditions and situations to prepare his men for possible operations on a nuclear battlefield.

Yet another problem will be the special demands made on the leaders by the tactics required to make operations on the nuclear battle-

fie[illegible]easible. The uncertainties, dispersion, and potential fragmentation of commands will place on junior leaders more responsibility than they have previously borne.

The final problem is the unit mission. How are we going to accomplish the assigned mission in light of all the unknown and imponderables? How do we prepare the nuclear battlefield leader to digest all these problems, with their innumerable possibilities, so that he can prepare his troops to successfully carry out their missions on a nuclear battlefield?

TRAINING FOR THE NUCLEAR ENVIRONMENT

As a unit leader we are going to have to instill in our soldiers the will to fight and to survive on the nuclear battlefield. The leader must instill in his men a resoluteness of purpose, the belief in the righteousness of their actions, and the attitude that as a fighting unit they can overcome the most difficult situation. This is akin to the concept that Soviet military doctrine calls preparing the Soviet soldier "spiritually for war." [2] Similarly, BG S.L.A. Marshall states that "the soldier must have a feeling of spiritual unity with others to do an efficient job of moving and fighting." [3]

Our training must be realistic enough that a psychological hardness will develop in the individual soldier that will enable him to overcome the emotional stress of nuclear combat. This realism can be enhanced by stenuous psychological and physical training problems. The training should take place during periods of darkness, rain, thunderstorms, snow storms, fire hazards and over difficult terrain.

The difficult routes under difficult conditions should be preferred. Realism can be achieved by using a nontoxic ingredient that would indicate to the soldier that he had not taken necessary precautionary measures, or had been subjected to an attack while in the nuclear radiation area. If he did not take the necessary measures the ingredient would cause him some discomfort, such as tear gas does in gas chamber training. If it were politically feasible which it probably is not, the ideal would be a radioactivly contaminated training area in which troops could gain confidence in their ability to breathe, eat, and drink in such an area.

Among the knowledge and skills to be acquired in training are the special dangers on the nuclear battlefield, how to avoid or minimize these dangers, and the treatment of radiation casulties.

Among the principal hazards are blast, flying debris, thermal radiation, and nuclear radiation. While the first three of these effects are also characteristic of conventional weapons, the soldier must be trained to appreciate the difference in degree which the nuclear environment poses. The nuclear radiation produces the greatest training problem, because of its technical nature and the invisibility of the effects. To minimize these hazards, the soldier must be trained to habitually dig in when time permits, to use available cover or drop prone at the flash of a nuclear detonation, to appreciate the protective quality of various combinations of uniform items, to decontaminate himself and his equipment, and to perform essential life process such as eating and drinking without unduly increasing radiation dosage.

medical aspects of training must include the use of all av detection equipment to avoid and monitor radiation exposure, th od first aid available for radiation sickness, and the symptom cative of various levels of exposure. One of the most difficu raining problems will be to convince the soldiers that they can b ick to the point of vomiting and still be able to perform full combat duties. All medical training must emphasize the primacy of the mission.

> Even in the event of massive losses of personnel and equipment, all officers, warrant officers, sergeants and soldiers must be imbued with the determination to complete, under all circumstances, their assigned mission.[4]

NUCLEAR TACTICS AND THE FEASIBILITY OF OPERATIONS

Throughout military history fire and manuever have varied in relative importance, depending on the military technology current at the time. On the nuclear battlefield firepower will be the predominant element, this is not to say that manuever will not be an important combat element. Manuever will be used more to force the enemy to form targets favorable to nuclear strikes. This is where the battalion combined arms (BCA) unit fits into the plan of action. These BCA units will be issued mission type orders, which, in conjuction with the SOP, will allow the unit commander a degree of flexibility and independence. This BCA unit commander will have sufficient artillery supporting that he will be able to take advantage of targets of opportunity, be they nuclear fire or conventional fire targets. This unit commander will manuever his force around the

nuclear battlefield being constantly on the search for favorable targets for his firepower and at the same time keeping his unit from becoming a favorable target for a nuclear strike.

> Because the risks are so much greater and the margins for error so much smaller it forces us to be more conscious of the instinctive wisdom that an objective achieved at the cost of all our combat power usually will be no achievement at all. [5]

He will be constantly on the alert as to where adjacent friendly units are and where enemy units are. He will have to have a general idea as to the nuclear doctrine used by the enemy force so that he can disperse his troops to the extent that they will not become a large enough target for a nuclear strike and yet concentrated enough to be able to resist a conventional ground attack. The unit commander will need to know the size nuclear weapons the enemy is using on different size targets, he will need to know the different radii of vulnerability of his unit to these weapons. With this information he can be better prepared to maintain the dispersion patterns that will be best suited for his unit on the nuclear battlefield.

The unit commander must at all times keep in mind the radiation status (RS) of his unit and the probable radiation exposure that the unit will acquire during the present operation. The operation exposure guide will be established for each operation and must be based on the radiation exposure of units at that time and upon the combat situation.[6] The use of radiation exposure information helps the unit commander determine how much additional radiation exposure the unit or individual can be subjected to before performance is affected. The commander may fail in his mission if he allows his unit to

become ineffective through too much radiation exposure. He must plan on how to accomplish the mission and maintain his command as a combat effective unit. The commander will need to know the RS category of each unit in his command so that in the execution of the tactical plan the units can be used in such a way as to achieve the best possible results with due regard for their current RS.

The units that are in the negligible risk category can be used in all combat situations. Units with a moderate risk category should be used in close support operations and to halt enemy attacks, they should not be expected to sustain a prolonged offensive. If a unit is in an emergency risk category they should be used only in areas where the radiation risk is negligible, or at times of extreme hazard to the command. If a unit in emergency risk status is used in a radioactive area, the unit will probably have to be replaced after the operation.

There is the probability that the commander could rearrange units within the command so that all units would carry the same risk category, rather than having units in different categories. The advantage of this is that he now has units that he can deploy in like situations and not have a unit or units that are doubtfully deployable. The disadvantages are that you now have commands that are unfamiliar with new units and you may be restricted as to operations, as all units have the same RS but on a higher basis. If the commander needed a unit with a low RS category to go into a high radiation area, he would not have one and would have to expose a unit to more than enough rads to put it in the emergency risk category. The

author believes that in the confusing and stressful nuclear environment, any avoidable reorganization or mixing of units is undesirable.

Radiation on the battlefield is considered a hazard and not an obstacle.[7] Thus, if necessary, the unit commander will operate through it and not around it.

Command and control on the nuclear battlefield will be made more difficult by decentralization. Once a unit has been committed to a nuclear battlefield there is always the possibility, despite efforts to duplicate communication channels, that there may be relatively little command and control from above the battalion level. When this occurs, reliance will have to be placed on the wisdom, judgement, and the initiative of the junior commnders (company, platoon and section leaders). The battalion commanders will be responsible for an area eleven times larger than on a conventional battlefield. There will be gaps of approximately 3 kilometers between company size units. These gaps are to reduce the possibility of one nuclear weapon putting two units out of action.

A BCA unit will have artillery supporting them to cover the gaps between units. They will be able to request delivery of nuclear weapons, through the brigade commander, if nuclear weapons are not available they can take the areas under fire with conventional artillery ammunition, mortars, and direct fire weapons. Artillery fire can be coordinated at battalion level to form mutual support for the units. Brigade will use the remaining attached artillery to fire on areas that need additional support. In this way they will have dispersion and yet have some mutual support artillery fires. The

tactical air support party at battalion will coordinate needed air strikes.

Communications between units may be at a minimum on the nuclear battlefield. During a nuclear firing of small yield weapons the electromagnetic pulse (EMP) that is generated will cause a sudden surge of electricity that may produce failure in electronic components. This may cause radios, radars, gun laying equipment and computers to malfunction. Since the unit commander will not be able to depend on radio, more emphasis must be put on pyrotechnics and other nonelectronic means. This possible weakening of communications will place even more emphasis on the battalion, company and platoon leaders having the ability to operate independently on the nuclear battlefield.

The doctrine of wide dispersion between units calls for increased all-around physical security. The BCA unit commander must exercise constant vigilance to reduce the unit's vulnerability to nuclear and conventional attacks. He will be constantly emphasizing cover and concealment, communications and security, and alert reconnaissance. He must not only confuse the enemy about his location and unit configuration, but is required to detect enemy forces around him so that they can be maneuvered into such positions that our firepower can be used effectively against them, be it nuclear or conventional.

The battalion commander must plan for the use of all available surveillance and target acquisition devices. These devices will aid the commander in locating enemy units so that they can be destroyed as far forward as possible.[8]

Communications will be held to a bare minimum, with mission type orders and division SOP's providing the tactical guidance necessary for BCA unit. With the sophisticated electronic detection devices now in the hands of surveillance units any electronic emission can be instantly detected and the source of transmission pinpointed to within meters of actual location. Also the present electronic equipment is not hardened against nuclear strikes and any equipment that is operating at the time of a nuclear detonation will be instantaneously hit by a surge of electrical current (EMP) which will cause it to malfunction, thus rendering it useless until damaged parts are replaced. This affected distance will vary from 2 - 10 kilometers, depending on the effective range of gamma-ray energy released, as the size of the area is only indirectly dependent on yield and type of burst.[9]

Division combat service support elements are faced with the same need for dispersion, cover and concealment, and communications security, as combat elements.

With the increased need for dispersion the CSS elements are going to be hard pressed to provide the services required by the division combat elements. The BCA units are going to be spread over a dvision area of 3000 square kilometers rather than the conventional division area of 750 square kilometers. Thus the BCA unit commander will have combat service support elements attached to his unit. These elements will be used by the BCA commander to increase the unit's ability to fight for a longer period with a minimum of resupply. A 3 day supply of selected Class I,III,V,VIII and water will

normally be carried with BCA units with 4 additional days prepositioned in division forward areas.[10] Resupply of combat elements will have to be accomplished during periods of reduced visibility, using prearranged rendezvous points.

The BCA unit will be augmented by a section from division maintenance battalion to perform necessary maintenance on equipment immediately, to include, as a last resort, cannibilization of inoperable equipment. This will provide the unit commander with a larger degree of flexibility and maneuverability by keeping a higher percentage of vehicles available. This should also cut down some on time lost waiting for resupply.

The BCA unit commander will have combat medics attached to his unit. These medical personnel will treat conventional as well as nuclear casulties. It will be the unit commander's responsibility to see that all unit members have a basic understanding of first aid so that they can reduce the work load of medics and help their buddies, while keeping in mind that the mission must come first.

The battalion or battalion task force commander very likely will be operating with a combined arms force. This battalion or battalion task force will be a force augmented by attachment of combat support and combat service support units. These attachments may be Stinger air defense, forward support supply and maintenance, medical, signal or engineer units. Size and equipment of attachments will depend on mission and availabilty of units. These attachments, most likely, will come from the division's organic combat support and combat service support units.

These attachments of combat support and combat service support elements will give the battalion commander a more independent, sustained fighting capability. These combined arms forces will have both a nuclear and non-nuclear battlefield capability. The non-nuclear battlefield missions will be: to close with the enemy so as to destroy or capture him, secure or deny terrain, gain information, and protect the battalion or a larger force.[11]

The nuclear battlefield mission of the battalion will be to locate targets for destruction by our nuclear weapons, to attack when the enemy forces have been sufficiently weakened and to provide security for our nuclear delivery units.

> For example, destruction of the enemy nuclear delivery means will become a principal objective and the maneauver of nuclear fires rather than troops will become a dominant feature of the nuclear battlefield.[12]

MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENT

The leader on the nuclear battlefield will be using fundamentally the same concepts, attitudes, and approaches to tactics as on the conventional battlefield. If this is not true, the priciples of war and the principles of leadership have been improperly identified as fundamental considerations. What will differ between the nuclear and conventional battlefield are the specific applications and emphases.

On the basis of theory, analogy from military history, computer simulation, and maneuver testing, the nuclear tactics described in the previous section should make operations feasible on the nuclear battlefield. The prediction that a technological advance would make

military operations impossible is not new to military history; in the early years of this century, some experienced officers believed that the machine gun would end war. Units have on many occasions continued to operate after suffering casulties equal to any predicted for the nuclear battlefield.

The key to mission accomplishment will undoubtedly lie in the intangible factors such as esprit and morale, which in turn will depend on leadership.

On the nuclear battlefield the unit leader must cope with troops who are living with the secret fear that they are already mortally afflicted with radiation, with the fact that a single round or attack by a single plane may virtually destroy his command, with uncertain support and communications, and with the fear that acting or reacting predictably may invite annihilation. The unit leader will have to inspire his men with greater confidence in his leadership than any military leader in previous history. The belief of his men in his knowledge and resourcefulness can subdue the natural tendency to panic and flight.

Nuclear battlefield commanders will have to be physically fit, emotionally stable, decisive, innovative, knowledgeable, aggressive, and above all willing and able to face the awesome implications of the nuclear environment.

Jerald A. Mortensen

JERALD A MORTENSEN
LTC AD USAR

FOOTNOTES

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9. Hall, p. 1-78

10. Field Manual 100-30 (TEST), p. 5-2.

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The basic question is how the unit commander can operate in a nuclear atmosphere and how this differs from the conventional atmosphere. A literary search was conducted in order to develop authoritive opinions on the nature and purpose of leadership and nuclear tactics, this was limited to command at battalion and lower. The information developed was considered in view of training the individual soldier, nuclear tactics and feasibility

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of operations, and mission accomplishment. It was concluded that unit commanders can operate on the nuclear battlefield by use of intelligence training and flexible adaptation to changing situations.