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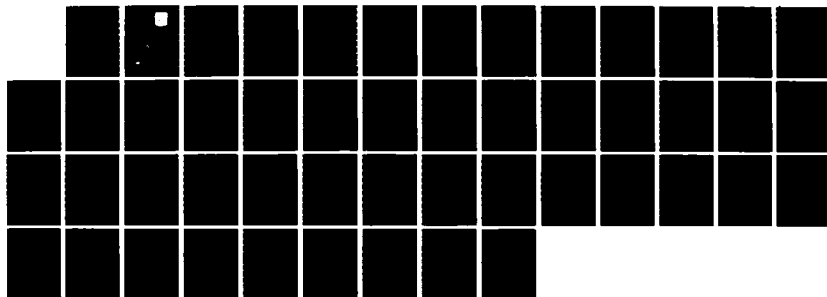
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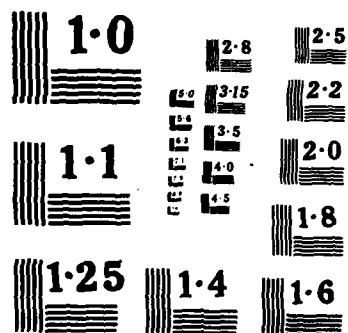
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ORIGINS OF THE CORPS AND OPERATIONAL ART

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOSEPH E. DeFRANCISCO, FA

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

OPERATIONAL ART AND THE CORPS IN THE US ARMY

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

BY

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21 April 1986

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Joseph E. DeFrancisco, LTC, FA

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Since 1976 the US Army has been embarked upon a doctrinal renaissance. The thrust of that renaissance has been to shift our warfighting doctrine from one based on defense, firepower, and attrition to one based on offense and maneuver. Two central aspects have been a concentration on large unit operations, beginning with the corps, and the reintroduction of the operational level of war. Originating in Napoleonic times both concepts were employed first in this country during the American Civil War. Since that time there has been a close link between the corps and the operational art in the US military experience. An examination of that link will lead to a better understanding of current Army doctrine.



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"In the Art of War - as in Nature - nothing is lost, nothing is created."¹ This Napoleonic overstatement contains at least a kernel of truth. Although the means and techniques of waging war may change, there are certain fundamentals of combat which remain inviolable. But warfare does evolve. Each war is different from the preceding one. We would be wise to heed Clausewitz's warning that the first task of the commander is to fight the war at hand and not try to make it something it is not, like the last war.²

Balancing the constancy and constant change in warfare is no easy task. Study is essential. A technique is to examine common factors or connecting links that hold together the fabric of warfare. One such connecting link that is of particular contemporary interest is military doctrine.

In a recent article on the subject, Dr. Jay Luvaas explains that doctrine is not an end in itself, but rather a "teaching tool" designed primarily for self-education.³ Doctrine is not a set of rules. It is a body of ideas and concepts about how an army organizes, trains, and fights.

In 1976 Army authors of FM100-5, Operations (FM100-5) introduced AirLand Battle doctrine. Subsequent revisions in 1982 and 1986 refined and clarified that doctrine. Today AirLand Battle stands as the Army's basic fighting doctrine. The central aspects of that doctrine are:

- o A focus on seizing and retaining the initiative

- o The requirement for mutliservice cooperation
- o The recognition of the importance of the operational level of war.

According to the authors of the latest version of FM100-5 "...there is nothing revolutionary about AirLand Battle doctrine."⁴ While this statement in no way diminishes the doctrine's value, it is true. "A focus on seizing and retaining the initiative" is a restatement of the principle of war, the Offensive. "The requirement for multiservice cooperation," like the similar requirement for combined arms cooperation, is a basic tenet of warfighting. Much the same can be said for many of the doctrine's other concepts like the generation of combat power, flexibility, speed, mission type orders, the indirect approach, and initiative by commanders. Time has not spoiled these concepts. They are neither new nor innovative, but they are valid and important. By compiling these and other concepts under a single cover and blending them into a coherent whole, the authors of FM100-5 have developed a "teaching tool" of great significance.

Of equal significance is the most innovative element of AirLand Battle doctrine, the operational level of war. The latest edition of FM100-5 reaffirms the broad division of warfighting activity into strategy, operational art, and tactics, and defines operational art as the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of war or operations through the planning and execution of campaigns or major operations.⁵ The operational art lies in what Liddell Hart calls the "shadowy borderline" area between strategy and tactics.⁶ Properly understood and used, it will help dissolve this band of uncertainty by forging a link between strategy and tactics. Strategy

seeks to secure national or allied policy objectives by establishing theater goals, and is the sole authoritative basis for operations. Operational art employs forces in campaigns or major operations to attain theater goals established by strategy. Tactics uses the combat power allocated and positioned by operational art to win the battles and engagements that will lead to attainment of campaign objectives.⁷ It is at the operational level, however, that the basic tenets of AirLand Battle (initiative, depth, agility and synchronization) become true combat multipliers. Hence, it is effective execution of the operational art that translates successful battles into successful campaigns and leads to the attainment of strategic goals.

While no particular echelon is uniquely concerned with operational art, it lies principally in the domain of the "large" unit. AirLand Battle proclaims that campaigns and major operations are conducted at the operational level while battles and engagements comprise the tactical level of war. The transition occurs at corps. The corps not only provides the link between tactical operations and strategic objectives,⁸ but also can and will operate at both the operational and tactical levels.⁹ The corps, therefore, is a critical element in the operational art as well as in the Army's umbrella warfighting concept, the AirLand Battle. These facts suggest a strong connection between the corps and the operational level of war. Examination of that link serves as a teaching tool to help understand what has changed and what has remained the same in the evolution of US Army thinking on large unit operations. In the process it can lead to a greater understanding of our current warfighting doctrine.

CHAPTER I

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CHAPTER II

ORIGINS OF THE CORPS AND OPERATIONAL ART

Historically, the corps is tied closely to the operational art. The study of the operational level as an art is a relatively modern phenomena dating back to the interpretations of Napoleonic warfare.¹⁰ Napoleon, one of the greatest practitioners of the operational art, also introduced the corps as the predominant military formation. The corps became so integral a part of his method of warfare that it became the sine qua non of his operational art.

Napoleon invented very little himself. Instead he developed and perfected the ideas and creations of others. From Pierre deBourcet came the idea of dividing an army into separate groups which would march dispersed, thus confusing and paralyzing an enemy, then concentrate to fight at a decisive time and place. From Count de Guibert came the concept of a war of movement which stressed the "supreme value of mobility and fluidity of force," and the importance of psychologically unhinging the enemy with simultaneous, multiple advances and threats to his rear, flank, and line of communications. The basic formation used to execute the "organized dispersion" of this war of movement would be a flexible infantry organization initiated by Bourcet and more fully developed by Guibert - the division. From other philosophers and practitioners of war came further refinements and more concepts.¹¹

His rich doctrinal inheritance included a ready-made army organization and methods of employment. He proceeded to synthesize and perfect what he had been given. While most of the operational concepts

were sound, the basic instrument of execution was not.¹² The French Revolution had spurred a revolution in the conduct of war. The result was a virtual explosion in the scope of warfare. Vast increases in the size of armies, areas of operation, and intensity and pace of combat had rendered the division inadequate. What Napoleon needed was a larger, more powerful combined arms formation able to control several divisions and capable of sustained, semi-independent action. His answer was the corps.

Napoleon's corps d'armee was the perfect formation with which to execute his mobile, offensive style of war.¹³ Each corps was staffed similarly but was composed of varying combinations and numbers of troops depending on its mission and the talent of its commander. It included sufficient infantry, cavalry, artillery and service units to operate independently for several days, and to engage any enemy formation in combat for at least one day. In the hands of an able commander it was able to carryout Napoleon's operational concepts on a grand scale.

At Ulm the corps proved the ideal instrument to demonstrate the "supreme value of mobility and fluidity of force." Organizing his 200,000 man army into corps, Napoleon dashed from the Rhine to the Danube executing a masterful envelopment onto the rear of his enemy. A surprised Austrian army found its escape routes and lines of communications cut by six powerful French corps. Facing destruction, the Austrian commander, General K. Mack, surrendered. Except for some minor engagements around Ulm, Napoleon had broken the will of the opposing commander and rendered his army useless through maneuver alone.¹⁴

One year later Napoleon gave Europe another lesson in the operational art. For the Jena Campaign he accepted great risk by leaving his own line of communications uncovered and assembling his entire army within striking distance of his Prussian adversary. Unsure of exact enemy dispositions and operating in hostile territory, Napoleon deployed his corps in a manner designed to maximize his army's ability to march dispersed and concentrate to fight. Characteristically he seized the initiative and struck first. Believing he had discovered the enemy main body he ordered a concentration. Within 24 hours 145,000 soldiers of five separate corps plus the army reserve assembled near Jena. But Napoleon had miscalculated. He faced only a fraction of the Prussian force. Their main army was several miles north at Auerstadt. There Marshal Louis Davout, whose corps had been detached for semi-independent operations, routed the Prussian force of over twice the size of his corps. The campaign resulted in the destruction of the Prussian Army and the French occupation of Berlin.

Ulm and Jena illustrate most of the salient characteristics of what our current doctrine calls the operational level, and the utility of the corps in executing at that level. As both emperor and general-in-chief Napoleon had no problem in subordinating strategic military goals to national policy and in developing operational concepts to attain those goals. In both campaigns he achieved strategic goals by accepting substantial risk for the promise of higher gains, by seizing and retaining the initiative, and by striking swiftly and deeply into the enemy's rear. In both cases he broke the enemy's will to resist, once virtually through maneuver alone, once through maneuver followed by sequential and simultaneous battle and relentless pursuit. In both

cases upsetting the adversary's center of gravity, the enemy army, resulted in attainment of the strategic objective, dismantling a hostile coalition by dictating peace terms first in Vienna, then in Berlin. Throughout these campaigns the size and composition of the corps made it the ideal formation for executing Napoleon's concepts. The corps, whether part of the main army or detached for semi-independent operations, as in the case of Davout at Auerstadt, translated strategic goals into battlefield realities.

Ultimate defeat did nothing to diminish the Napoleonic mystique. The plethora of written words on his campaigns assures his place as a master of the operational art. He and his interpreters offer both a theory and practical examples for study of the operational level of war. His two chief interpreters are Karl von Clausewitz and Baron Henri Jomini. Jomini's ideas are fewer in number and more straightforward. Undoubtedly two reasons why his work initially gained popularity in America.

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CHAPTER III

DEBUT IN AMERICA THE CIVIL WAR EXPERIENCE

By 1861 the art of war in the United States had been conditioned by the writings of Jomini and Napoleon. American officers had learned the campaigns, military theories, and maxims in sketchy history courses at the US Military Academy.¹⁵ A translated copy of Jomini's Precis was said to accompany most Union and Confederate officers as they marched off to battle one another.¹⁶ Many of these copies had been translated by Henry Halleck, a Union general regarded as one of the few and foremost American students on the art of war. Besides translating French works, Halleck wrote one of his own. His Elements of Military Art and Science, which closely followed Jomini, was read widely by American officers. Both sides, therefore, began the war with a doctrine based on the Napoleonic experience.¹⁷ But America was not Europe and technology had done much to increase the lethality of weapons and means of transportation since 1815. As a result both sides would suffer as they attempted to blend contemporary conditions with proven concepts of warfighting and struggled to develop viable organizations and command structures.

The South was first to employ the corps. General Albert Sidney Johnston's attack by "column of corps" at Shiloh was an attempt to use Napoleonic concepts and formations to achieve Napoleonic results. The attack failed. Among the reasons was that the corps in this case was merely an expedient lumping of troops into a large cumbersome formation.

What was planned as a double envelopment turned into a plodding frontal attack. The Union forces were no better organized. They had no corps. Each separate "army" had a number of subordinate regiments, brigades, and divisions. The army commander's span of control was simply too great. Faulty organization lead to confusion, intermingling of forces and piecemeal, uncoordinated commitment. The outcome, as in so many early Civil War battles, was high casualties on both sides and inconclusive results.

Organization of forces was little better in the Eastern Theater. Believing that his subordinates lacked the requisite experience and talent, Union General George McClellan hesitated in the creation of subordinate corps. President Lincoln, already impatient with McClellan's hesitation on so many matters, acted. In March 1862 the President directed the establishment of corps in the Army of the Potomac. By October of that year corps were also in place in the Western armies.¹⁸

General Robert E. Lee came much closer to the Napoleonic concept when he formed two permanent corps in his Army of Northern Virginia after the Antietam Campaign. In Generals Thomas Jackson and James Longstreet he found two commanders equal to Napoleon's Marshals. By giving his corps commanders authority to exercise semi-independent command and to act at their own discretion according to his overall plans, Lee was able to conduct a more fluid war of movement.¹⁹

Initial battle tests of the new organizations went to the South. In the Fredericksburg Campaign Lee's new corps out marched and out maneuvered the Army of the Potomac. Union General Ambrose Burnside, who had replaced McClellan, organized his corps into groups he labeled

"Grand Divisions"--a harbinger of the field army. But no organizational change could undo Burnside's faulty operational decision to commit forces piecemeal into the enemy's naturally strong defensive line. A piecemeal attack into enemy strength had never been wise. By 1862 technology had made it suicide.

Chancellorsville was the next test. Often cited as a premier example of the operational art, this campaign generally is accepted as Lee's greatest. Here the Army of Northern Virginia performed to perfection many of the tenets of Napoleonic warfare which are part of our current doctrine. Lee seized and retained the initiative; he accepted risk in order to achieve greater gain; he confused and paralyzed his enemy through swift movement, the use of interior lines and economy of force; and he fostered and capitalized on the initiative of his subordinate commanders. Most important perhaps, he fought outnumbered and won.

Still, there may be more to learn from his opponent, General Joseph Hooker, than from Lee. Dubbed "Fighting Joe" because of his aggressiveness in combat, Hooker had compiled a brilliant record commanding at regimental, division, and corps level. Lincoln selected him to replace Burnside after the disastrous Fredericksburg Campaign. Hooker responded by revitalizing the Army of the Potomac and developing a sound campaign plan to turn Lee's left flank and trap him between the bulk of the Union forces and the Rappahannock River. Initially all went well. Hooker maneuvered three full corps to Lee's rear, had another corps closing fast to the same area, and positioned a strong force south of the Rappahannock near Fredericksburg. He had every opportunity at

hand for a decisive victory against an enemy he outnumbered nearly two to one. But Hooker was not Napoleon, and Lee was not Mack. Hooker lost his nerve and surrendered the initiative. Lee seized the opportunity and gained a great victory.

The campaign illustrates the difference between execution at the tactical and operational levels. Hooker, both before and again after Chancellorsville, proved to be an exceptional commander in carrying out tactical missions at corps level. But, he was found seriously deficient in command of an army. He could not sense what he could not see or touch; he lacked the ability to anticipate future operations and the will to execute in the face of uncertainty. Chiefly for these reasons he failed at the operational level.

One Union general who excelled at the operational level was Ulysses Grant. The 1982 edition of FM100-5 wisely selected his Vicksburg Campaign as the example of offensive fundamentals at the operational level. Grant knew how to maneuver and fight his attached corps. At Vicksburg he took great risks and allowed his subordinates wide latitude. In other campaigns he controlled actions much more closely. He had the vision and moral courage to carry a campaign through to its strategic objective, and, more than any general on either side, he understood the nature of the war he fought. By war's end he had risen above the pure operational level and was issuing strategic directives to 17 commands totaling 533,000 soldiers.²⁰

Throughout the last 2 years of the war the Union corps grew in importance. To the soldier, his regiment and his corps were the most significant units. The establishment of corps patches and headquarters flags were a manifestation of the psychological importance of the

soldier's attachment to his corps. Usually commanded by the most gifted regular officers available, the corps became the principal tactical unit of execution during the latter years of the war. Esprit de corps greatly reduced regimental and brigade bickering, and helped create a potent tool for army commanders to use at the operational level.²¹ As in Napoleonic warfare, the general concept for large unit operations saw the army commander design the plan, select the objective, and allocate the resources; then use his available corps to execute.

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CHAPTER IV

POST CIVIL WAR THROUGH WWI

After the Civil War the huge armies of the Union dissolved. The day of the large unit faded quickly. By 1869 the Army was scattered among 255 military outpost and was little more than an Indian constabulary. Organizations as large as regiments seldom assembled. In the words of one historian

...the Army appeared a place where officers learned all about commanding fifty dragoons on the western plains but nothing about anything else.²²

Thoughts of large unit operations lay dormant for over 30 years.

With an Army of just over 28,000 men scattered in small units throughout the United States, our nation was unprepared militarily for the Spanish-American War. Drastic measures were necessary to form a military instrument capable of keeping pace with the new national policy of expansion. As volunteers rushed to fill manpower needs Congress authorized the formation of brigades, divisions, and corps on the model of the Civil War. Eventually seven corps were activated but only one, General William Shafter's V Corps, deployed to Cuba and fought. Fighting in Cuba offered no positive lessons on the operational art. Shafter's independent corps operation succeeded largely due to Spanish ineptitude.²³ All seven corps were quickly disbanded after the war.

As the Army decreased in size it did not lose interest in large unit operations. The Russo-Japanese War, the threat of war with Mexico, and the increasing militarism of the European powers served to keep some focus on large-scale operations. Evidence of our continuing interest

was the publication of a Field Service Regulation (FSR) in 1914. This edition, perhaps influenced by prevailing European thought, stressed the offensive as the decisive form of combat. Although mentioning the desirability of mobility, it went on to state clearly that "...fire superiority insures success."²⁴ As for organizations, the division became the basis of our mobile army (that portion of our land forces not assigned to Coast Artillery). When necessary, several divisions would be grouped together into field armies. There was no mention of the corps. Ignoring the experience of the Civil War, we envisioned deploying a force of numerous field armies composed of varying numbers of divisions.

In practice, this organizational doctrine proved unsuitable in World War I. Ultimately the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) consisted of seven corps organized into two field armies. Originally the US corps was designed as a fixed, six division organization. Later it took the more flexible task force mode used in the Napoleonic and American Civil Wars.²⁵

World War I saw the impersonalization of the corps. In the Civil War the corps became an identifiable rallying point and source of pride to soldiers. When circumstances permitted, it was used on semi-independent missions and its commanders allowed a degree of latitude in execution. The static trench fighting of World War I, however, reduced the corps to little more than an unrecognizable bludgeon. There was scant opportunity to employ the corps in an operational maneuver as Lee at Chancellorsville and Grant at Vicksburg had done.

General John J. Pershing's own account of an incident during the St. Mihiel Campaign tells something of the centralization of authority

exercised during World War I. At the time the AEF was still organized as a single field army commanded by Pershing. During the course of the campaign, he personally used a telephone to

...direct the V Corps commander to send at least one regiment of the 26th Division toward Vigneulles with all possible speed.²⁶

Such directions are a long way from the mission type orders encouraged in our current doctrine.

Despite Pershing's efforts to introduce mobile warfare to the Western Front, the 1914 FSR rung true in its emphasis on firepower. Attrition based on heavy firepower and overwhelming mass dominated the concepts of a war of movement. The object became killing the enemy at a faster rate than he killed you. The corps served as a conduit for passing information between army and division. Rather than a force of tactical execution aimed at seizing a critical objective, it was an expedient control headquarters for large numbers of troops. We were using large units to conduct campaigns but actions were tactically not operationally oriented. In such a war the defense came to dominate the offense. It seemed as though the machine gun, barbed wire, and mud had given lie to the prewar assertions that the offense was the decisive form of combat.

CHAPTER IV

ENDNOTES

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23. Ibid., p. 306; Vincent J. Esposito, COL., The West Point Atlas of American Wars, Vol I pp. 155-57.

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CHAPTER V

POST WWI THROUGH WWII

All were not convinced of the demise of the offensive. Many saw in the tank and the airplane the means to shift back to mobile, offensive operations. Our 1923 FSR proclaimed that the ultimate objective of all military operations is the destruction of the enemy's armed forces by battle, and emphasized that decisive results can be obtained only by offensive action.²⁷ Unlike its 1914 predecessor this edition listed the corps as an essential military organization. Using World War I as an experience base the 1923 FSR called the corps primarily a tactical organization and charged the (field) army with "...territorial, strategical and tactical functions ..." in planning and executing "...the broader phases of strategical and tactical operations."²⁸

Seeing a need to delineate more clearly the responsibilities of large units, the Army published A Manual for Commanders of Large Units (Provisional) in 1930. This publication said the corps was primarily a tactical unit of execution and maneuver,²⁹ and called the (field) army "...the fundamental unit of strategical (clearly operational in current terminology) maneuver."³⁰

The Army continued to teach that the corps was to be offensive and maneuver oriented. he forward to a 1932 paper entitled "The Maneuver of the Corps Within the Army," the assistant commandant of the

US Army Command and General Staff College wrote, "The employment of larger units, such as corps, requires a broader conception in which the maneuver element becomes paramount."³¹

On the eve of World War II the Army solidified its doctrinal position in the first ever edition of the FSR entitled FM100-5, Operations. This edition proclaimed the dominance of offensive action; stated the purpose of the offensive as destruction of the enemy army; and designated the corps as the principal tactical headquarters of execution.³²

Once involved in a war of the gigantic proportions of World War II, the Army recognized a need for more definitive doctrinal underpinnings for its large units. In 1942 it replaced the provisional Manual for Commanders of Large Units with a formal manual - FSR, FM100-15, Larger Units. While not mentioning the operational level by name, this publication devoted one entire chapter to "campaign planning" and another to "strategic maneuvers." These chapters unmistakably address what we now call the operational level. In making a distinction between a "plan of campaign" and a "plan of operations" the original FM100-15 marked the distinction we make in current manuals regarding engagements, battles, and campaigns.³³

A key point in this manual is the recognition that large unit operations are separate and distinct from small unit operations for reasons other than size alone. Large unit operations for example, would require an expanded scope and depth of vision in both planning and execution. The manual was similar to prevailing doctrine in designating levels of responsibility. "General doctrines of strategic maneuver ..."

would apply to the (field) army while the corps remained "...primarily a tactical unit of execution and maneuver."³⁴

To ensure the corps could serve this purpose, much thought and energy went into its organization. General Lesley J. McNair, Commander of Army Ground Forces until his accidental death at St. Lo in 1944, developed a definitive idea on tactical organizations:

they would concentrate a maximum of men and materials in offensive striking units capable of destroying the enemy's capability for resistance.³⁵

The largest tactical unit would be the corps. McNair abolished the "type" corps in 1942 and made the corps a flexible task force organization. Essentially it consisted of a small command and staff element that controlled a pool of nondivisional combat units and a varying number of combat divisions.³⁶ McNair's corps was designed to be the Army's "...key headquarters for employing all combat elements in proper tactical combinations."³⁷

In practice the Army followed the basic guidance established by its senior officers and enunciated in its literature. Deviations occurred based on the scope of operations, the enemy, and the forces available. In his book, American Strategy in World War II, Kent Roberts Greenfield described what he called "grand strategy."³⁸ "Grand strategy" constituted the national and allied goals and policies from which US theater commanders - General Eisenhower in Europe, Admiral Nimitz in the Pacific Ocean Areas, and General MacArthur in the Southwest (SW) Pacific - derived their theater (and operational) plans. In the two theaters of principal concern to the Army, Europe and the SW Pacific, goals were similar but the method of attainment and principal units of execution were not.

Eisenhower and MacArthur sought to destroy enemy armed forces through mobile, offensive operations. Both stressed and exploited closely synchronized air, land, and sea operations. But here the similarities fade. MacArthur's "island hopping" strategy can be seen as a series of deep attacks which avoided enemy strength and aimed at cutting enemy lines of communication. While MacArthur used army formations in the Philippines and Okinawa, and the corps at Papua, most of his operations were executed by division or regimental combat team. Eisenhower, on the other hand, routinely executed his plans through army group and army formations. His "broad front" strategy left little room for bypassing enemy strength at theater level. Continually focusing on the enemy armed forces, he set theater objectives which were gained by army groups and armies using their principal ground maneuver force-the corps.

Operations and organizational structure in Europe came much closer to prewar Army designs than did those in the SW Pacific. Because of the nature of combat in the SW Pacific formations larger than corps were unnecessary in many campaigns. In Europe, however, the corps proved to be the smallest unit capable of executing the complex synchronization of joint operations.

CHAPTER V

ENDNOTES

27. FSR, 1923, p. 77.

28. Ibid., p. 1.

29. U.S. Government Printing Office, A Manual for Commanders of Large Units (Provisional), p. 29.

30. Ibid., p. 15.
31. US Army Command and General Staff School, "The maneuver of the Corps Within the Army."
32. FSR, FM100-5, Operations, (hereafter FM100-5, 1939).
33. Ibid., p. 10.
34. Ibid., pp. 52-56.
35. Kent Roberts Greenfield, et al., The Organization of Ground Combat Troops, p. 273.
36. Ibid., pp. 352-365.
37. Ibid., p. 365.
38. Kent Roberts Greenfield, American Strategy in World War II, pp. 1-2.

CHAPTER VI

POST WWII - VIETNAM

After the war American military attention stayed riveted to Europe. As tensions with the Soviet Union heightened the Army focused increasingly on another World War II Europe type conflict. National policy was leaning toward reliance on atomic weapons and correspondingly slashing Army strength. Meanwhile Army doctrine was asserting that "... the fundamental principles of combat remain unchanged."³⁹ If war came, the Army expected it to come in Europe. Combat would be on familiar terrain along established lines. The Army would organize its resources into proven organizations and fight according to proven principles. It would fight primarily offensive actions aimed at "... the destruction of the effectiveness of the enemy's armed forces and his will fight."⁴⁰ The Army was prepared doctrinally to fight the last war. The nation, disarmed and disinterested, was prepared to fight no war.

When North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel in 1950 President Truman searched for a proportionate response. The atomic solution clearly was too drastic. US air and naval intervention proved insufficient. Though ill-equipped and physically and psychologically unready for war, US ground troops were committed.

In a frantic effort to save South Korea, forces were employed piecemeal by battalion task force through division size elements. The

first corps organizations appeared in early September as General Walton Walker sought to improve his command and control within the Pusan Perimeter. Later that month MacArthur launched the Inchon invasion using General Edward Almond's independent corps as a strike force.

Inchon was the high point for US operational art in Korea. It contained all of the familiar elements of highly successful operations: accepting risk for the attainment of greater gain, striking deep into the enemy rear to unhinge his nerve and sever his lines of communication, and seizing and maintaining the initiative.

But Inchon was unique. It was an isolated conventional operation in a new kind of war. The Army had no doctrine for a limited war. The Army's tactical and psychological dependence on continuous battle lines, like those in World War II Europe, proved to be a great continuing weakness. The "limiting process" of the war was even more difficult to digest. The idea of foregoing the use of certain weapons and the attack of certain areas as well as changing the concept of victory was more than most soldiers could understand.⁴¹

Instead of destroying the enemy armed forces, the political objectives of reducing casualties and disengaging from an unpopular war came to dominate battlefield activities. Senior political and military leaders began to focus attention down to small unit actions. Thinking at the operational level eroded quickly. By 1952 bold, offensive actions such as Inchon were out of the question. Patrols had to be run, and the enemy kept off balance if possible, but no attacks above platoon size were permissible without corps approval.⁴² No longer the major tactical unit of execution and maneuver, the corps had become another

control headquarters in an overly centralized system. Small units supported by massive firepower gave tactical expression to policy and strategy made in Washington. The operational art had ceased to exist.

Chinese intervention in Korea had signaled a shift in the nature of US military doctrine. Until then it had been based on offensive action directed at destroying the enemy's armed forces. As the war settled into a stalemate and networks of trenches and bunkers reminiscent of World War I appeared, however, the defense began to dominate. With American casualties becoming a political issue commanders settled on firepower rather than maneuver to attack the enemy. It is not surprising that the 1954 FM100-5, the first published after Korea, espoused a doctrine stressing firepower and defense over maneuver and offense.⁴³

A doctrine based on firepower fit well with President Eisenhower's "new look" in American military policy. Taking office in 1953, Eisenhower succeeded in securing a prompt cease fire in Korea and resolved that there would be no more limited wars. Instead, the United States would meet threats to national security with the "massive retaliation" of nuclear weapons.⁴⁴

Throughout the Eisenhower years a focus on nuclear warfare dominated US military thinking. Army planners wrestled with various organizations and formations designed to facilitate operations on an atomic battlefield. In essence most schemes tried to widen dispersion between and mobility of tactical units in order to decrease the adverse effects of nuclear attack. Additionally, efforts were made to improve strategic mobility in order to deploy forces quickly to potential trouble spots.⁴⁵ The operational level concepts and large unit

maneuvers which had been forsaken in the closing years of the Korean War were buried further during the era of massive retaliation. In its 1959 "Modern Mobile Army 1965-1970" study, the Army proposed the complete elimination of the corps. The study urged the reduction of the contemporary division into a smaller, lighter organization and, when necessary, the grouping of six divisions into a "small, compact, self-sustaining field army."⁴⁶ Though these recommendations were never implemented, the study reflected a basic tenet of its era. Nuclear warheads had replaced large maneuver units as the means of striking decisive blows against enemy armed forces. Small, mobile maneuver units simply would exploit the success of our massive firepower. Views such as these oversimplified the operational art out of existence.

Nuclear warfare still dominated Army doctrine when President Kennedy took office in 1961. His policy of "flexible response" was in principle more realistic than Eisenhower's "massive retaliation," but in reality lead the Army from one fixation to another. "Flexible response" envisioned the ability to answer enemy threats to national security with a nuclear, conventional, or counter-guerrilla response. Doctrinal literature supported the new national policy. The 1962 FM100-5 introduced the concept of the spectrum of war and discussed limited war in detail.⁴⁷ The 1963 FM100-15 reaffirmed the concept of a spectrum of war which included "cold through general war with varying levels of limited war in between."⁴⁸ It also reaffirmed the corps as the Army's principal tactical unit of maneuver and execution.⁴⁹

Any hope of returning to serious operational level thinking was thwarted by an added dimension of the enemy threat. In an effort to checkmate US nuclear superiority and to avoid embarrassments like Korea,

the Soviets proclaimed a new strategy in supporting "wars of national liberation." Because several such wars were actually in progress, most prominently in Southeast Asia, the Kennedy Administration paid increased attention to its counterinsurgency capability. The Army retained its conventional war capability with formidable forward based forces and a sustaining base in the continental United States, and it retained its nuclear capability. At the President's personal urging, however, counterinsurgency came to dominate Army thinking and subsequently Army doctrine.⁵⁰

American involvement in Vietnam crystalized this doctrinal bias. Our proclaimed national policy in Southeast Asia was the elimination of insurgency inside South Vietnam.⁵¹ The military interpretation and execution of that policy would ensure a continuation of the trend, begun after the Inchon landing, to focus on the tactical level of war at the expense of the operational level.

By its nature counterinsurgency lies in the domain of small unit operations and is tactically oriented. The United States conducted combat actions in Vietnam accordingly. While there were a number of division and multidivision operations during the war, brigade and smaller size units conducted the bulk of US combat operations. Field forces usually took the place of corps. Field force commanders had territorial responsibilities as well as tactical ones and served as senior advisors to Vietnamese corps commanders.⁵² Encumbered with territorial and advisory duties, field force headquarters sometimes orchestrated but more often merely monitored combat operations. Most planning and fighting was left to smaller units.⁵³

According to General William Westmoreland, US military strategy in Vietnam was essentially that of a war of attrition. Given the national policy of defeating insurgency and politically imposed geographic limits, Westmoreland reasoned that his only course was to seek, fight, and destroy enemy forces in South Vietnam.⁵⁴ Due to the nature of the enemy and the geography of the area of operations, such strategy centered on small unit operations. Army leaders expended great effort in perfecting the techniques of activities like airmobile operations, patrolling, ambushing and coordinating air and artillery fire. Because it had the potential to inflict heavy losses on the enemy while holding down American casualties, the use of supporting fires became a central feature of US operations. In even the smallest fire fights the employment of helicopter gunships and artillery became commonplace; air-ground cooperation in the use of tactical air assets rose to great heights and ultimately extended to the use of B-52 strategic bombers against tactical targets.⁵⁵ In keeping with the concept of a war of attrition, military energy was directed at killing enemy in the largest numbers possible.

By focusing on tactical execution Army leaders skipped the operational level. They essentially went directly from a military strategy of attrition to a tactical execution of that strategy relying principally on massive firepower to destroy the enemy. With continuous attention on small unit operations the Army became expert at that level. But, with no corps or similar size unit (except for the short-lived US XXIV Corps) solely devoted to planning and executing large-scale

maneuvers designed to attain theater goals, there was never much hope for executing at the operational level. The fixation with tactical excellence and the absence of operational thinking help explain how our Army could win every battle yet lose the war.

CHAPTER VI

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40. Ibid., p. 80.
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42. T. R. Fehrenbach, This Kind of War, p. 564.
43. FM100-5, 1954.
44. Weigley, p. 525.
45. Robert A. Daugherty, MAJ, The Evolution of US Army Tactical Doctrine, 1946-76, Leavenworth Papers, No. 1, pp. 14-18.
46. George T. Metcalf, COL, "The MOMAR Field Army," Army, September 1960, pp. 55-57.
47. Harry G. Summers, Jr., COL, On Strategy, pp. 62,65; FM100-5, 1962.
48. FM100-15, 1963, p. 3.
49. Ibid., p. 40.
50. Summers, pp. 66-67; Weigley, p. 542.
51. W. C. Westmoreland, GEN, A Soldier Reports, p. 153.
52. Ibid., p. 155.
53. Charles B. MacDonald and Charles V. P. von Luttichan, "The US Army in Vietnam, a revision of Chapter 28 of American Military History (published separately), pp. 630-634.

54. Westmoreland, p. 153.

55. For examples of the use of B-52's in a tactical role see Westmoreland, pp. 180,283.

CHAPTER VII

DOCTRINAL RENAISSANCE

The Army that emerged from Vietnam was experienced in small unit operations and the application of firepower but little else in the field of warfighting. Our army in Europe had been used as a rotation base for Vietnam and was in disarray. Forces in the continental United States shared a similar fate. To compound these problems, both equipment modernization and doctrinal development had stagnated during the Vietnam years. An Army that had focused for 10 years on fighting an unconventional war against a relatively primitive foe in an area of peripheral interest to US national security, woke to discover that it faced a huge conventional and nuclear threat from an old but modernized foe in an area of vital interest to the United States. Quick action was essential. Army leaders decided to begin by revamping operational doctrine.⁵⁶

Consequently, in 1976 the Army published a new edition of FM100-5. The manual drew much interest and served the vital function of causing concerned readers to think about operational concepts. It espoused the idea of winning the "First Battle" while fighting outnumbered, stressed the increased lethality of modern weapons, and reemphasized the necessity for air-ground cooperation by introducing the term, AirLand Battle. Renewed emphasis on the European battlefield and large unit, especially corps, operations were hallmarks of the new publication. It did not, however, break with its 1968 predecessor in implying the superiority of the defensive over the offensive and firepower over

maneuver. While some criticized the manual for its defensive, firepower orientation,⁵⁷ it was an important first step in the Army's doctrinal renaissance.

By the late 1970's the Army was in the midst of fundamental doctrinal change. Since World War II it had embraced and discarded overcommitment to the one dimensional doctrines of massive retaliation and counterinsurgency. Korea had proven the impracticality of universal reliance on the nuclear response and the 1973 Arab-Israeli War had shown the need to be able to combat modernized, conventional forces. As the Army redirected its thinking toward large unit operations in a conventional war, it discovered an uncomfortable link with the past. It still clung to a doctrine dominated by defense and firepower.⁵⁸

All that changed in 1982. The 1982 edition of FM100-5, and its 1986 revision, were more than just teaching tools. They sought to change the attitude of the Army by imbuing it with an offensive spirit under an umbrella concept called AirLand Battle doctrine. First introduced in the 1976 FM100-5, AirLand Battle received much more extensive treatment in 1982 and 1986 editions. Using historical examples of campaigns, endorsing the primacy of leadership as an element of combat power, and reasserting the validity of the principles of war, the manuals presented a doctrine "...based on securing or retaining the initiative and exercising it aggressively to defeat the enemy."⁵⁹

As the offensive supplanted the defensive, so also did maneuver supplant firepower. Though recognizing that "...maneuver and firepower are inseparable and complementary elements of combat,"⁶⁰ the manuals extolled the effectiveness of maneuver throughout their pages. It is maneuver that allows the commander to seize and maintain the

initiative, to exercise the speed and surprise necessary in successful operations, and to turn the inherent risk of deep attack into a strategic gain. After more than a 30 year hiatus the Army again had a doctrine based on offense and maneuver.

It also was reintroduced to the operational level of war. Employing many of the ideas used in a 1972 publication by Soviet counterparts,⁶¹ proven experts in the field, FM100-5 authors sought to explain how to conduct warfare at the level between strategic and tactical operations. Simply stated, the authors recognized the importance of the operational level and maintained that the basic tenets of AirLand Battle applied at that level as well as at the tactical level.

With its emphasis on campaign fighting the operational level clearly lied in the sphere of the large unit. Its introduction, therefore, reinforced the contention held since the 1976 debut of AirLand Battle that the corps was the centerpiece of the Army's new doctrine. Other publications supported this belief. In an "Army 86" study John Romjue pointed out the corps's unique capability for conducting operational maneuver and discharging the central tasks of AirLand Battle.⁶² When our leaders embarked on the "Army of Excellence" program they took great care to explain the necessity for allocating assets to ensure the corps's capability to execute campaign plans and remain the focal point of the Army's doctrine.⁶³ Finally, a 1984 circular devoted to corps-doctrine interface stated that of all levels of command the corps was best suited to execute the Army's operational concept.⁶⁴

Such heavy reliance on the corps is founded in part on its capabilities. As the headquarters where national and tactical intelligence systems are merged, the corps has the ability to gather and process information for the close, deep, and rear battles, Air Force representation on its staff and its own representation in its supporting air headquarters greatly facilitate the corps's ability to synchronize ground and air fires. Its combined arms, task force nature make it a powerful ground combat element. Lastly, it is the Army's principal headquarters for nuclear fire planning.

Still, many contingencies require more than one corps. In such cases the corps acts as a tactical unit while a field army assumes the major operational responsibilities. The 1986 prepublication edition of FM100-5 implies that only when employed alone does the corps exercise operational as well as tactical responsibilities.⁶⁵ The point is made more strongly in FC100-16-1 which states that multicorps operations are required to realize the complete execution of AirLand Battle,⁶⁶ and that the field army (not the corps) bridges the gap between strategy and tactics.⁶⁷

There is no real dispute here. Labels hold little value and the size of a unit does not determine whether it is engaged in combat at the operational or tactical level. What matters is the objective sought and the methods used to obtain that aim. The objective should be a theater strategic goal, the enemy center of gravity.⁶⁸ The methods used to upset that center of gravity are the tenets of AirLand Battle -initiative, depth, agility, and synchronization. Depending upon the forces available, the enemy, and the theater of operations those means

could be employed by a corps (or smaller unit) or a field army (or larger unit). The important point is that we now have a doctrine that teaches how to win in combat with the organizations available.

CHAPTER VII

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56. Donn A. Starry, (GEN), "A Tactical Evolution--FM100-5," Military Review, Vol. LVIII, Aug 78, pp. 3-4.

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58. Doughty, p. 49.

59. FM100-5, 1982, p. 2-1.

60. Ibid., p. 7-7.

61. V. Ye Savkin, The Basic Principles of Operational Art and Tactics (A Soviet View), p.v, three levels of warfare; pp. 279-83 tempos of combat operations and preservation of combat effectiveness (protection); p. 169 connection between mobility (maneuver) and firepower.

62. John L. Romjue, A History of Army 86, Vol II (2 vols), pp. 65-88.

63. US Army Combined Arms Combat Development Activity, FC 100-1 The Army of Excellence, pp. 4-1--4-3.

64. FC 100-15, p. 4-13.

65. FM100-5, 1986, p. D-4.

66. US Army Combined Arms Combat Development Activity, FC 100-16-1 Theater Army, Army Group and Field Army Operations, preface.

67. Ibid., p. 5-2.

68. FM100-5, 1986, p. 3-3.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Throughout the evolution of our doctrine we have consistently turned to the corps as our largest tactical unit of execution and maneuver. That premise has logic in that it follows from the very purpose for which Napoleon created the corps. He needed a force large enough to execute his strategic concepts - his operational art. As Army commander he made the campaign plan and determined the theater objective. He used his corps to execute the plan to seize the objective.

Our own experience is similar. The Army commander shapes the campaign and the corps commander executes. Hence we speak of Grant's Vicksburg campaign not Sherman's or McPherson's, and of MacArthur's Inchon Landing not Almond's. With its focus on combat, the corps has proven to be the ideal headquarters for executing campaign plans.

Tactical responsibility does not negate operational concerns. In order to make AirLand Battle work the corps must think operationally. It has overall responsibility for the peacetime training as well as the wartime command of a vast portion of our active and reserve forces. Besides establishing training guidance it controls, evaluates, and participates in large unit exercises. It must, therefore, take a leading role in proliferating AirLand Battle concepts, including practice of the operational art, throughout the Army.

Partners since their birth during the Napoleonic era, the corps and operational art are today viable elements of our Army's doctrine. There has always existed a strong link between the two. Regardless of whether the corps is called "the centerpiece" of our doctrine or in which level we place its activities, it remains our largest unit of tactical execution and maneuver. The corps is designed to fight. Of all of our units it is best suited to carry out the tenets of our current doctrine and to bridge the gap between strategic goals and tactical operations. How well it prepares itself and its subordinate units to execute those tasks will determine to a large extent the results of our next contest of arms.

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