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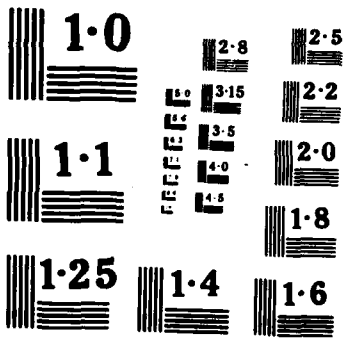
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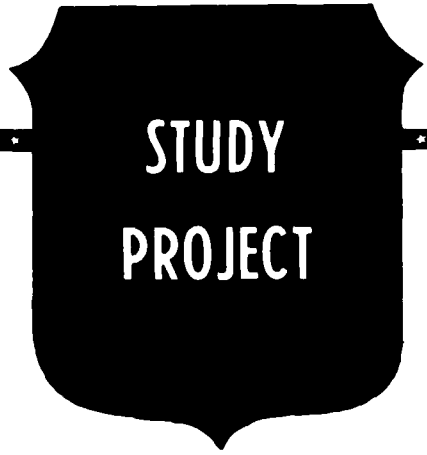
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"MANEUVER WARFARE" REVISITED
A PLEA FOR BALANCE

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MARK R. HAMILTON

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Secondly, the paper points out the lack of utility and applicability of some of the common "buzzwords" being used in today's Army. Specifically assailed is the concept of "turning within a decision cycle." The paper describes the reasons that this commonly used phrase has little applicability to ground warfare.

Finally, the paper mentions the tendency for the "Manuever Warfare" camp to cloud discussion of doctrine in a kind of intellectualism and elitism which has no use in forming the necessary consensus demanded by doctrine.

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"MANEUVER WARFARE" REVISITED

A PLEA FOR BALANCE

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LTC MARK R. HAMILTON
USAWC 86

**** A B S T R A C T ****

This paper is a plea for balance in the current pursuit of understanding of the concept and the teaching of "Maneuver Warfare." It specifically addresses the need for a more complete analysis of some of the more common historical examples which are commonly offered as examples of the supremacy of "Maneuver Warfare." The paper, in no way disagrees with the desirability of conducting the kinds of operations associated with the ill-defined concepts offered by advocates of "Maneuver Warfare" but suggests that the desirable results of historical battles may be too readily ascribed to the dynamic, offensive actions of the victorious side.

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Finally, the paper mentions the tendency for the "Maneuver Warfare" camp to cloud discussion of doctrine in a kind of intellectualism and elitism which has no use in forming the necessary consensus demanded by doctrine.

The politics of reform invariably seek to force choice between concepts set dramatically apart by reality, rhetoric or both. The desired outcome is that at least a modified version of the proposed reform will be the product of consensus. I seek a modification of the concept proposed by "maneuver warfare" advocates. There are a number of advocates: William S. Lind, Steven L. Canby, and a host of officers from the ranks of O-3 to O-10. There are some detractors: Richard K. Betts, Robert L. Goldrich, Victor H. Krulak, and others. There are even some rather well balanced approaches, to be found in the writings of Edward Luttwak and Colonel Huba Waas de Czege. On the whole, however, I do not believe this maneuver warfare advocacy has been critically examined. I freely admit that I do not know exactly what a "maneuver warfare advocate" is. I suppose they are people who regularly argue with "firepower-attrition" advocates. In any case, they will serve as my foil, devoid of further quotation marks. Reformer William S. Lind describes maneuver warfare as follows:

Recently, the concepts behind maneuver war have been elucidated, organized, and expanded into an overall theory of conflict. This theory was developed by Colonel John Boyd, a retired air force officer, and is appropriately known as the "Boyd Theory." Boyd has observed that in any conflict situation, all parties go through repeated cycles of observation-orientation- decision action. The potentially victorious party is the one with an observation-orientation-decision-action cycle consistently quicker than his opponent's (including the time required to transition from one cycle to another). As the faster party repeatedly cycles inside his opponent, the opponent finds he is losing control of the situation. Often, he suffers mental break down in the form of panic or passivity and is defeated before he is destroyed physically. The Boyd Theory is the background for maneuver warfare doctrine.

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This portrayal has been too readily embraced. Its support by historical examples has been accepted without sufficient examination of the history cited. Its foundation buzzwords, "Turning within a decision cycle," have become familiar ones, used too often without understanding of source or application. Maneuver warfare is, by no means, all wrong. It has, however, appealed to the American proclivity for the quick fix or the single solution and needs to be adopted somewhat more cautiously.

During the last dozen or so years, the U.S. Army has been enjoying a renaissance of creative and critical military thought along side which the far more public modernization of the Army pales in historical significance. This renaissance began in the work surrounding the publication of FM 100-5, 1 July 1976. This much maligned document was our first look, deep into the concepts of the modern industrial war as fought by the weapons and doctrine of our most likely enemies. The criticism of it provided the first forum for the new advocacy of maneuver warfare. Predictably, the rhetoric of reform cast the doctrine of this version FM 100-5 as a mindless extreme called "firepower-attrition." Not as predictably, much of that rhetoric and reformation fervor has been unabated by the publication of FM 100-5, 20 August 1982. The current status represents too much of a good thing. History has been improperly applied, metaphors have become thoughtless buzzwords, and the proper balance of art and science that constitutes appropriate military thought has given way to a sort of elitist, heightened awareness available to an enlightened

few.

HISTORICAL BIAS

The desire by maneuver warfare advocates to prove the superiority of their vision of war has inspired the use of historical examples, famous leaders and famous battles, to illustrate the dominance of maneuver. If this movement contributed nothing else, which is nowhere near the case, the renewed study of military history by the officer corps has justified its efforts. Unfortunately, some--even many--have confused the selective use of military history with the use of selected military history. If you study half a war--you will probably become half a warrior. In that vein, it is proper to examine the "other half" of three common maneuver warfare examples for the purpose of gaining a more balanced perspective. At the risk of diluting my own evidence, I submit that we must be careful about the range of conclusions drawn from any historical battle, and certainly from ancient battle. It is asking too much of any analysis to consider at once and in proper perspective, the size of the battlefield (at Cannae about one square mile), the relative skills of the battle captains, the skills of the soldiers, their confidence in their leaders, factors of METT, and so forth. The best we can hope for is to read a great deal of military history and look for the patterns of thought by the leaders of each side--before and after the battle. We can decide what dominated the action of battle, what worked and what did not. We can hypothesize about the why's and why not's and even indulge ourselves with some what

if's. However, it is fruitless to gather a series of battles that purports to demonstrate the superiority of a fixed, forward, linear defense. The examples are plentiful, but not meaningful, except in the sense that they are examples of the thought process of one military leader in a specific set of circumstances. Nor is it of any more value to gather a series of battles that purports to demonstrate the superiority of maneuver against fixed, forward, linear defense. Grant, Lee, Rommel, Montgomery, and Zhukov each provide examples of the successful use of both. Most also provide an example of the failure of each. What follows is not proof of anything. It is simply more evidence of the circumstances at that time and place, more questions that ought to be explored in the context of today's circumstances, and which have been largely unaddressed by the advocates of maneuver warfare.

In the battle of Cannae--216 B.C.--Hannibal used the double envelopment to virtually annihilate the Roman army which had marched to meet him. We do ourselves a disservice to box this battle neatly into solely a victory for maneuver warfare. Equally as central to the victory was the resolute and disciplined actions of the soldiers conducting the defense who first gave ground and then stiffened and held the nose of the Roman phalanx. The appeal of the sweeping flank attacks and final envelopment is undiminished by two millennia, but don't overlook the rest of the battle. More troops were committed to defense than to maneuver. Hannibal knew he had to block the nose of the penetration in order to succeed. With his back to the river, Hannibal was not

holding ground; there was nowhere for the penetration to go. He was holding the nose of the penetration, using most of his force to do it, and of course that is exactly where Hannibal positioned himself, personally leading the blocking force. Does that mean it was a battle of mobile defense? I don't think so. Neither was it a battle of maneuver. Cannae was a battle, not an exercise to demonstrate the superiority of one or another type of military operation. Consider the courage and stroke of genius to position his forces with backs to the river. At once, Hannibal offered a temptation to the Romans to hurry the destruction of a "trapped" enemy and offered to his soldiers good reason to halt the backward movement at some stage of the conflict. What does that look like at the operational level in NATO? On which side of Bonn should CENTAG stiffen and hold? What are the missions for the Norwegian, Spanish and Turkish "cavalry"?

Consider Scipio. He was one of the minority of Romans who was not hacked to pieces in the deadly embrace of Hasdrubal's heavy horse and the Numidian light horse cavalry. Scipio apparently learned that the cavalry battle or the flank battle ought to be emphasized. In any case, Scipio met Hannibal 14 years later at Zama where he soundly beat Hannibal's cavalry and his force. In this battle, Scipio had the Numidian cavalry. It is important to consider how pivotal the Numidian cavalry was to each victory. If you decide it was crucial in each case, the military lesson you draw from these battles may be one of force structure rather than offensive maneuver. In other words, you should consider if the battles were won by choice of maneuver or

by possession of the superior means.

World War II

The appeal of the Blitzkrieg to a professional soldier is understandable. The speed, the decisiveness, and the relative paucity of friendly casualties are all highly desirable goals of any military operation. Our current doctrinal love affair with World War II German tactics and terminology springs in part from our admiration of the facility with which German armies dominated Europe during the first half of the war. Perhaps as great a factor, though, is the facility with which the German Army embraced the new doctrine of mobile warfare far more rapidly and completely than did the rest of Europe.

Without some romanticism, soldiering would be dreary work indeed; however, the time for that romanticism does not include the necessarily dispassionate study of the art of war. Lee may well be your choice of companion, but Grant must be your great captain. Even to the most ardent fans of the Wehrmacht, it must give pause to realize that the war did not end in June 1943. Yes, Bruenhilda, there was a Kursk. The Soviet cannons, fired in victory after the battle of Kursk, were not all that premature. The war was not over, but neither was it ever again in doubt. As students of military history, we need to pay more attention to the Eastern front from July 1943 onward rather than stopping there to wonder what went wrong.

If we are to assess the tactics and operations of a maneuver oriented force, it is appropriate to assess that force and those tactics and operations over as great a spectrum of conflict as history will allow. In that regard, the success of German operations against the outnumbered, outgunned, outtrained, outled, defending Poles ought to be supplemented by the failure of this same German force against the more men, more tanks, equally outtrained and outled, attacking STAVKA after July 1943. It may be that the latter is more interesting than the former given the likely lineup of a future war in Europe. This part of the war seems to be virtually ignored by the same writers who gush over the German successes in the first half of World War II. It is shoddy scholarship to draw conclusions based on half of the evidence. It is equally as shoddy to dismiss the entire issue by accepting the "what if" and "if only" offerings of the defeated German generals as reported by Liddel Hart, "All felt that Russia's offensive power could have been worn down by elastic defense--if they had only been allowed to practice it."² It is somewhat excusable for a man who has written in the 1930's on the superiority of mobile warfare and the elastic defense to view World War II with an eye toward proving his theories. It is also somewhat excusable for defeated generals to claim they could have won if the civilian head of state had only let them do it their way. It is not excusable for today's soldiers to let THAT writer's interviews with THOSE generals stand as uncontested evidence of the realities of THAT war. I offer no thesis that suggests that maneuver warfare as practiced by the Wehrmacht is not a desirable offensive doctrine. I do suggest that history has yet

to demonstrate its utility against attacking Soviet forces.

THE 1973 ARAB-ISRAELI WAR

Similar to the lure of the Blitzkrieg is the fascination of maneuver warfare advocates with the 14 October 1973 crossing of the Suez canal by Israeli forces. It was an important operation, daring and successful, but only part of the war. Almost 50 years ago, Marshal Tukhachevski, marshal of the Soviet Union, said: "In general, operations in a future war will unfold as broad maneuver undertakings on a massive scale. Even so, against the background of these operations and as part of the process of their development there will be separate phases of stalemate, which will produce positional warfare which cannot be excluded."³ He was correct. The Israelis fought a skillful positional defense to cover the time needed for mobilization. "From the outset Avigdar realized that at all costs he had to prevent the Syrians from reaching the lateral KUNEITRA-HASADAH road. In order to effect this objective, he fought a defensive, static and holding battle, utilizing at all times mobile reserves to protect his flanks and to block any possible breakthrough in the brigade line."⁴ Warfare is multifaceted and multidimensional. Its study is ill-served by isolating a single technique and ascribing to it the victory or defeat. That is seldom correct and never instructive. Professor Jay Luvaas warns against ". . . a quick fix, a list of interchangeable solutions, a one-dimensional assessment of problems requiring understanding as well as identification."⁵ It is only fair to note that maneuver warfare advocates emphasize that there

are no cook book solutions. Even so, a balanced presentation of history will do more for the cause of how to think than will a biased history and a word of warning.

METAPHORS AND BUZZWORDS

Retired Air Force Colonel John R. Boyd is a man whose diligence in research and enthusiasm in presentation has earned quite a following for his reduction of military history to the question of turning within an opponent's decision cycle. The metaphor is appealing and appropriate to a former fighter pilot for whom turning within his opponent's radius is certain victory. There is a great potential for error for those who apply this metaphor directly to land warfare--even airland warfare. Again I offer the caution about the use of military history as proof. In this case, history is assessed with a working definition that says something like, "presenting the enemy with more decisions than he can effectively deal with equals victory." That definition is meaningless. If the enemy were able to EFFECTIVELY deal with what he was presented with, he would never lose. Therefore the same definition works equally well by substituting "attrition", "maneuver," or "letter bombs" for the word "decisions". While not an entirely fair analysis, my suggestion is that identifying ineffectiveness with the loser of a battle has no meaning. Further, ascribing the cause of that ineffectiveness to any one cause is somewhere between highly debatable and capricious. The same questions arise. Did the Blitzkreig work because of its decision cycle or because of its tanks? Did the Wermarcht lose

because of the Soviet decision cycle or because of the manpower of the STAVKA?

The idea of a decision cycle is a worthwhile thought. It appears to me that the German success against France was far more a result of rapid presentation of unexpected force than the superiority of any weapon. It is clear that the French Army was just reacting to event 2 when they heard about event 3 and the Germans were in the process of event 4. My caution is that it does not appear to be the single key to victory. I cannot imagine a suggestion that the Soviet force was "turning within the decision cycle" of the German force in the events following July 1943. Any definition that would include the rather cautious brute force Soviet operations of the final two years of the war as examples of beating the German decision cycle has expanded beyond utility. The Germans were not outthought, they were outfought by forces massing a 10:1 advantage at breakthrough points; by defenses at Kursk that laid out 8 defensive belts, 200 miles in depth, with 11 anti-tank guns per kilometer, 1.5 mines per meter, and 13,000 artillery pieces.

Part of the reason that the metaphor is suspect deals with the nature of air-to-air combat versus ground combat. Air-to-air combat is essentially few-on-few (even with a wingman). It is three-dimensional. It enjoys omni-directional mobility, and essentially uniform trafficability across its zone of operations, battles are brief, within battles movements are iterative; to a far greater extent than land warfare, disengagement without dam-

age is an option (to seek combat on more favorable terms).

Land warfare is many-on-many. It is really only two dimensional even with air whose ordinance is dropped to support two dimensional maneuver or positioning. Trafficability confines and confounds, slows or denies total freedom of action. Battle tends to be longer than air-to-air; within battles, movements are continuous rather than iterative; and disengagement once battle is joined (even at the recon level) is very difficult without some damage and some expenditure of ammunition.

The other reason the metaphor is suspect deals with a consideration of "decision cycle." I'm not certain that is the proper description of the United States Army's system. We have an "order cycle." We recognize it and seem to take it into account. The "order cycle" was the basis for the mysterious areas of interest/ areas of responsibility that intrigued the Army in the early 1980's. A question presented to commanders at various levels asked how long it took to receive a mission--give guidance--staff the situation--write the order and distribute it--and have forces at the LD. The median answers were: for brigade--12 hours, for division--24 hours, And for corps--72 hours.⁶ Later kilometers were added with the footnote that these distances might alter according to METT.

An order cycle, 12 hours at the brigade level is fundamentally different from a decision cycle. The latter is a process

of selection from among finite and rehearsed options. In the dog fights that inspired the metaphor, the MIG was set up for presentation with a relatively finite choreography which he was unable to follow. That choreography consisted of many iterations of rehearsed movements. In Army terminology, we are talking about what amount to battle drill movements, or what are recently being called "techniques." The utility of this metaphor in its iterative sense is at the level of battle drill. However agreeable the concept of "turning within a decision cycle," outmaneuvering the enemy rests on out thinking and out executing.

What that says is that a metaphor taken directly from air-to-air warfare ought to be looked at carefully as to its application to what appears to be the quite different form of warfare on land. A careful look at the events which spawned the initial observation by Colonel Boyd shows a set of circumstances somewhat different than suggested by common usage of "turning within a decision cycle."

The F-86 dominance of the MIG-15 was an inversion of the mismatch predicted by the MIG's superiority in most commonly compared characteristics. It is too great a stretch of events to surmise that our pilot's compiled a 10:1 kill ratio by virtue of outthinking the enemy. In the observe, orient, decide, and act cycle, the F-86 by virtue of a bubble canopy enjoyed superior capability to both observe and orient. These advantages forced the greater performance characteristics of the MIG to be committed reactively. Additionally, the F-86 was equipped with

hydraulics which allowed it to react to the pilot more quickly than the MIG to its pilot. This is as far as the maneuver warfare advocates have gone before making comparisons to land warfare which nearly beg to be made.

One more look before you leap. Had these advantages of the F-86 been applied one single time it is doubtful that they would have been sufficient to overcome the advantages of the MIG-15. However, the nature of air-to-air warfare allows many iterations of taking advantage of small superiorities before conflict resolution. It is quite easy to imagine a ground combat scenario which runs through a better observation, more rapid orientation, quicker decision, more rapid action sequence--ONCE. It is somewhat more difficult to imagine a land combat force iterating this phenomenon without embroilment or entanglement. Unlike the aerial dogfight, land warfare tends to last long enough at every level to allow the enemy to react, even to readjust so that the next attempt may not prove as advantageous as the first. In any case where the ability to observe or orient or decide or act is only marginally superior to an enemy, it is necessary to iterate many times before a USEFUL advantage can be gained. In land warfare it is possible to AGGREGATE advantages intelligently and synergistically to bring about significant (though brief) superiority. That is the scenario which unfolds for the Blitzkrieg in France. It requires some stretching of likelihood to describe a land warfare scenario wherein the iterative application of relatively small advantage (the F-86 vs MIG-15 case) accrues suffi-

cient leverage to dominate an enemy force. In short, for land warfare, many units once--not one unit many times.

I believe the distinction between aggregation and iteration to be a key one in the study of and training of land warfare. Although beyond the scope of this introductory piece, an examination of that distinction suggests varying emphasis in progressive levels of officer education and describes the primary command and control functions at various levels. Further, I believe our intuitive recognition of the quality of aggregation spawned our current, awkward concept of synchronization. Our current appreciation of "turning within a decision cycle" reflects too much emphasis on speed and agility--iteration and too little on combined arms, supporting attacks, economy of force--aggregation. We have not fully understood that speed is only necessary, not sufficient.

Another example of buzzwords not serving their purpose is the ever growing lexicon of German words in our military doctrine. Don't miss the point. This is not a made in America argument. As much as any other purpose, military doctrine seeks to supply the force with a useful, COMMONLY UNDERSTOOD VOCABULARY. It is not too much to suppose that part of the admirable singularity of thought and ease of sharing of intent in the German Army sprang from the remarkable capacity of the German language to convey nuance. It is no accident that German is the mother tongue of psychology. Still, it is most effective when spoken to Germans. Ask three American officers to define the term SCHWERPUNKT. You'll get three different answers. Or, ask one maneuver warfare

advocate to define SCHWERPUNKT. You'll still get three answers.

The second 'filter,' and the third 'glue' that holds activities together is the FOCUS OF EFFORT or, to use the German term, Schwerpunkt. This is sometimes translated as 'POINT OF MAIN EFFORT,' but such a translation is dangerous. IT IS NOT A POINT ON A MAP. It is WHERE THE COMMANDER BELIEVES HE CAN ACHIEVE A DECISION, and it TRANSLATES INTO A UNIT, as in 'Schwerpunkt is 2nd battalion.'

.....
Schwerpunkt IS NOT JUST THE MAIN ATTACK (though the main attack IS OFTEN THE SCHWERPUNKT). IT IS A CONCEPTUAL FOCUS, not just a physical one. All commanders refer to the Schwerpunkt, along with their superior's intent and the mission, in making their own decisions. Each makes sure his actions support the Schwerpunkt. This is why it is the third 'glue' that keeps activities from degenerating into disorder.

The Schwerpunkt can also be understood as THE HARMONIZING ELEMENT or MEDIUM through which the contracts of the intent and the mission are realized.

The question is not whether this discussion is ultimately intelligible but whether it is readily absorbable in a useful form to be the commonly understood vocabulary of doctrine.

Finally, the maneuver warfare advocates create a sort of elitist mystique around the doctrine they wish to be accepted. The conviction that only a chosen few have had the education or experience necessary to understand the doctrine explains in part the continued fervor even after the publication of FM 100-5, 20 August 1982. Further insight is to be found in a description by a graduate of the Advanced Military Studies Course, USACGSC:

Without question, the authors of Airland Battle doctrine developed it with in-depth theoretical and intellectual underpinnings. They had a vision of modern war connecting the present to the past and the future. This intellectual substance dissipated during the consensus-building process of doctrinal development.

Consensus building is essential to doctrine. Too often in the writings of maneuver warfare advocates failure to embrace their concepts is seen as a failure to understand or a lack of opportunity or desire to be enlightened. In the article cited above, the explanation for the officer corps' "remaining lethargic in accepting the doctrine" is couched unmistakably in theoretical and intellectual terms. Words such as "thinking," "understanding," "intellect," "cerebral," "smart people," "brilliance," and so forth are used 30 times in the first two pages. I offer no Luddite fear of intelligence, but rather a caution to avoid the cerebral mystique surrounding what must be consensus in order to be a workable doctrine. The frequency is unique, but the tone is familiar. It is most often associated with an alleged failure to understand the lessons of military history, with the pitfalls addressed earlier in this paper.

In whatever form, it is a counter-productive force in our institution. If, indeed, maneuver warfare is a concept "dissipated during the consensus-building process," we ought to examine the reasons for dissipation. Maybe the detractors are not all dumb or unenlightened. No doctrine understood by a chosen few whose keen intellect allows grasping of "the abstract and inherent intellectual power of the doctrine,"⁹ is of use to this Army. We need doctrine acceptable by consensus, and understood by a majority. If maneuver warfare fits this bill, let's stop parading it as the " compilation of the thoughts of some of the most brilliant men in history."¹⁰ It may be the robes of kingship fit too loosely yet.

This has been a plea for balance. Nothing is so pitiful as a good idea lost in presentation or good intentions thwarted. My fear is that some parts of the Army are buying too quickly and selling too hard the idea of maneuver warfare. A proper look at military history, a consideration of the jargon which spawns our buzzwords, and a sober assessment of just how wonderful and mystical the concept really is will go far toward a useful consensus.

FOOTNOTES

¹ William S. Lind, "Defining maneuver Warfare for the Marine Corps," Marine Corps Gazette, March 1980, p 56.

² Liddell Hart, The Other Side of The Hill, Cassell, London 1948, p 21.

³ Quoted by John Erickson, The Road to Stalingrad, Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, London 1975 p 4.

⁴ Chaim Herzog, The War of Atonement, Little, Brown & Company, Boston, 1975 p 114.

⁵ Jay Luvaas, "Lessons and Lessons Learned : A Historical Perspective," The Lessons of Recent Wars in the Third world Volume 1, edited by Robert E. Harkary and Stephanie G. Neuman, Lexington Books, Lexington, 1986. p 69.

⁶ Colonel Victor Letenoff, interview at U.S. Army War College March 1986.

⁷ William S. Lind, Handbook of Maneuver Warfare, Westview Press, Boulder, 1985 pp 17-18.

⁸ Major Wayne M. Hall, "A Theoretical Perspective of Airland Battle Doctrine," Military Review, March 1986, p 33.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

END

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