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Napoleon's Tactics from Civil War to World War I

MSG Bradley Schneier

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

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SGM David Poehlein

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*A good topic needing better documentation and organization. The conclusion should be at the beginning of the paper. The increasingly important role of the Am. NCO is not well developed.*

## Abstract

Any study of warfare would not be complete without a ~~complete~~ look at Napoleon Bonaparte's tactics during the Napoleonic Wars and his legacy into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His military tactics revolutionized the art of war. Great military leaders from the Civil War to World War I utilized these tactics until modern technology forced them to change and break the stalemates that developed over time. Military leaders closest to the fighting most often developed the changes because they knew firsthand the effect of rifle and <sup>machine guns</sup> entrenchments. Soldier's lives were continually lost in numerous battles from the Civil and World Wars due to the inability for field commanders to change.

title indicates to WWI

## Outline

Thesis: The progression of military theory and doctrine transforming from the Civil War to World War I contains impressive wins and catastrophic defeats. Innovative leaders on the battlefield changed doctrine in combination with new weapon technology.

### A. Civil War

1. Napoleon's Theories
2. Civil War General's execution of warfare (H103-Emory Upton)
3. Development of doctrine

### B. World War I (H106 Auftragstaktik)

1. History
2. German Tactics
3. American/British Tactics

### C. NCO contributions

1. Doctrine changes
2. Mission Success

Soldiers adapt to an ever-changing battlefield and military history proves that we must 'relearn' some hard lessons through time. Napoleon Bonaparte developed military tactics that revolutionized the art of war. Military leaders from the Civil War to World War I used these tactics even when the loss of life bordered on 'slaughter'.

### Napoleonic Wars

Any study of history, theory, and doctrine of warfare would not be complete without a study of Napoleon's tactics and campaigns. Superior weapons and tactics attributed very little to Napoleon's tactics. The common tactic during this time in history was the massing of troops. The French Army's main weapons differed little from his enemy. Napoleon's army would begin moving in corps size, widely spread, and along separate routes. Once the enemy's main position was located, his corps would deploy close together, and advancing in a diamond shaped formation. Napoleon's main force would pin the enemy down, while the bulk of the French Army swept around to cut his communications and compel him to turn and fight at a disadvantage or to surrender/ (Snell, 2005, Napoleonic Tactics),

In the offense, Napoleon's offensive movement was supported by massive support fire. He usually combined simultaneous attacks to his enemies' front with a main blow to his opponent's flank with infantry and cavalry. Using several variants to the main attack, he would launch a flank attack. When the enemy gradually weakened, Napoleon would launch his reserve to deliver the devastating final smash. Infantry attack columns supported by cavalry and horse artillery moved to breach the enemy's front or flank. Engaging with light cavalry, Napoleon's army would turn a disorganized retreat into a decisive rout/ (Snell, 2005, Napoleonic Tactics). Tactics, combined with modern technology, began proving themselves on the battlefield with

several decisive victories. History proves that leaders fight the last war with the last war's tactics.

Future military leaders continued to study and retain the innovations of Napoleon at West Point. Baron Antoine Henri Jomini transferred Napoleon's strategy and tactics to English.

Napoleon's teachings became regular academia at the newly founded West Point. Robert E. Lee and George B. McClellan studied these strategies while attending West Point and were avid

members of the Napoleonic club. Lee's turning maneuver at the Second Battle of Bull Run (1862) and at the Battle of Chancellorsville (1863) was classic examples of <sup>implementation of</sup> Napoleon's strategy.

All Civil War battles are related back to these Napoleonic tactics (Answers, 2008, Napoleonic Warfare). <sup>different from References citation</sup>

General George McClellan created a turning maneuver that utilized all fields of modern military disciplines. Experts state that if his plan were followed with earnest, the Civil War would have ended in a few years. (The Confederate goals were to attack the rear, reclaim territory, and capture Richmond, <sup>impossible</sup> (Answers, 2008, Napoleonic Warfare).) McClellan's plan demonstrated the American perfection and distinct style of Napoleonic tactics. Civil War leaders believed tight interior lines would strategically overtake enemy forces. American soldiers drilled in rapid maneuvering by foot with tight interior lines, which always produced battlefield success. Americans were taught to use these tactics with all the resources available. The invention of the railroad allowed for rapid movement of troops and equipment. American commanders morphed the old school tactics with the railroad with great success. Military planners began planning operations with the lines of rail and water carefully protected. The protection of these valuable transportation lines and natural obstacles became fully integrated into modern warfare. Leaders well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century continue to use this doctrine today. <sup>source?</sup>

The fundamental problem involved in a linear attack was that the long, thin lines presented easy targets for defenders. The smooth bored pieces could only fire when the attackers were within fifty yards. The old-fashioned linear attack became obsolete with the invention of fast-loading rifled musket, which was longer ranged and more accurate than the smoothbore. Linear attack into such rifles constituted murder or suicide. Most tactical changes most often came from brigade or regimental commanders who were close to the fighting and knew at first hand the effect of the rifle and entrenchments. The inability of higher commanders to change their tactics, even with the suggestions from lower commanders, cost numerous Soldiers their lives. Military planners unaware of what carnage their plans were causing at the battlefield refused to change until the horrors of war were fully realized. Military commanders did not seek tactical draws on the Civil War battlefield. Colonel Emory Upton developed new military tactics during the Battle of Salem Church. He and many other junior officers realized that linear tactics were no long satisfactory. Upton's tactics were simple and traditional. After a short artillery barrage, he maneuvered his columns forward making his unit less of a target, and smashed into the Confederate lines. Upton's men quickly spread through the trench lines and routed the Confederate troops. Colonel Upton proved his new tactics worked. After the Civil War, he prepared a new system of infantry tactics for the cadets at West Point. The idea of having soldiers fight as individuals or in small units seemed impractical to military thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. This kind of thinking did not disappear until well into the First World War.

source?<sup>7</sup>

### World War I

The First World War was different from prior military conflicts; it was the meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> century technology with 19<sup>th</sup> century mentality and tactics (Wikipedia, 2006, Military Strategy),

Commanders believe that the old-fashioned linear attack would still work on World War I battlefields. Over 40 million casualties would have to suffer before military planners and commanders developed new tactics to break the trench line stalemate. *source?*

The Germans quickly embraced the machine gun in 1904; every regiment was equipped with a machine gun. Elite German motorized infantry units deployed with several expert machine gun crews. The British were less excited about the machine gun. The British Army considered the weapon unmanly and not befitting on the modern battlefield. After huge losses to the machine gun in Vimy Ridge, Marne, Cambrai, Somme, Verdun, and Gallipoli, the British began to field new light and heavy machine guns. Germans and British commanders began scientifically placing these weapons systems on the battlefield (Military Technology, 2008, German Notes).

Barbed wire placed on the battlefield also caused linear tactics to become obsolete. The use of barbed wire caused the infantry assaults to slow down and breakup the interior lines so critical during the Civil War battles. Infantry and cavalry slowed by the wire became easy targets for the machine guns to cut down. The combination of the newly developed barbed wire, combined with machine guns was responsible for the greatest amount of casualties of World War I.

Weapon technologies influence the battlefield only when coupled with new tactics. German defensive doctrine consisted of a relatively lightly defended forward post, with a more powerful main position where a strong powerful counterattack could be launched. The British defensive doctrine consisted of equally matching the German trenches and artillery batteries. Artillerist believed that the rolling artillery barrage would cut barbed wire and create gaps for the infantry to assault through. Military planners developed impressive defense systems that out-of-date tactics could not break through for most of the war. *source*

The Germans continued to evaluate their tactics and military planners developed the Auftragstaktik or mission command. Although listed as a tactic, these commands are more about leadership than tactics. The military leader instructs subordinate leaders to complete a clearly defined goal and the forces to finish the mission. The subordinate leader devises the planning initiatives and allows for flexibility during the execution of the mission. Germans attacked rear areas with artillery fire to disrupt the command and control nodes, support personnel, and reserves. Simultaneously, attacks smashed into the Allied lines fixing the Soldiers in their trench lines while other attacks surrounded the entrenched Soldiers usually forcing surrender or annihilation. The Soldier's personal leadership influenced the mission and was only possible with the approval of the staff officers located in the formations' rear area.

Noncommissioned officers (NCOs) became very prevalent and critical on the battlefield. NCOs began leading small groups of men toward a specific goal and locations. The military commanders began to recognize initiative, resilience, and maneuverability as critical tenants of German tactics and doctrine. Americans arriving late to the World War I battlefields did not attempt to break the German lines with human waves. General Pershing devised job titles for tank commanders and tank drivers. He assigned them rank that he thought matched their responsibilities-in these cases, sergeants. The infancy of troop leaders began to emerge as small-specialized units ready to be tested. The test would come in World War I as the Allied forces attacked through the Argonne Forest. After initially succeeding with newfound small unit tactics the fighting doctrine became an endless series of firefights between squads, platoons, and companies. NCOs leading these desperate assaults knew what had to be done. These NCOs and their troops pressed forward to ultimately victory after 47 days of combat. The First and Second Armies gained over 30 miles and defeated 47 German divisions.

interesting  
but what's  
the point?



### Conclusion

Napoleon Bonaparte developed new tactics and innovations that led to the battlefield success during his era of warfare. Civil War leaders studied these tactics and executed them until the nature of warfare and weapon technology forced theory and doctrine to change. Innovations and weapons technology only carry an army so far. Small unit leadership emerged as the defining principle in warfare. The developing NCO corps proved to be the missing link between doctrine and mission success. NCOs educated and experienced in warfare began affecting the battlefield without substantial commissioned officer supervision. (Great military leaders from General George C. Marshall to General George S. Patton, Jr. magnify the accomplishments of NCOs with winning the World Wars.) Subordinate leaders, armed with the commander's intent, create the flexibility needed to develop the future of warfare long after World War I. *not in text*

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