

AIRLAND BATTLE



Implications for the Infantry

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Any review of the military literature of the past two decades or so reveals not only that the Army constantly finds itself standing at the threshold of one thing or another, but that these thresholds always seem to portend major change. Many of these changes, fortunately, are stillborn. Thus, the announcement of reaching another threshold that heralds still more ominous change tends to provoke skepticism, if not downright cynicism. Yet the publication of TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5, *The AirLand Battle and Corps 86*, and the approval of the final draft of a new Field Manual 100-5 justify such an announcement, for the doctrinal shifts the two publications embody have major implications for those who will fight the next war.

To be sure, the publication of the previous version of FM 100-5 (July 1976) created a considerable stir, and the pangs attendant to its birth have not totally subsided. But that excitement stemmed as much as anything else from the startling and lethal lessons of the Israeli experience and the personal magnetism of the author. The Army really did not have to do anything different; it just had to do things better and faster.

The new doctrine, though, demands some significant changes. And these changes fall on no one more heavily than on the infantry commanders and operations officers at the brigade and battalion levels. To enact this doctrine, they will need to reconsider how we fight.

The basic principles of the AirLand battle are few and simply stated:

- Deep attack is essential.
- Deep attack and the close-in fight are inseparable.
- Planning for nuclear and chemical fires must be continuous.

Both of the new publications offer compelling logic for each principle. The main criticisms of the previous doctrine held that it sought, at best, a draw, and called for engaging an enemy's strengths rather than his weaknesses. Numerous studies and wargames showed that regardless of how the attrition ratios fared, the end result remained the same — the United States Army lost.

The new doctrine tries to avoid those problems by attacking an enemy force at each level (at least for first echelon armies). Such attacks offer numerous benefits: They slow the arrival of follow-on echelons, exact casualties on combat and support forces, and create the opportunity for offensive action at the forward line of own troops (FLOT). Thus, the deep and the close-in battle cannot be separated. The allocation of resources, the assignment of missions, the logistical support — in short, everything connected with fighting battles — must all take place with an eye to the total battle. They cannot be viewed as separate fights. This point is an important one. It fundamentally shifts the focus of the battle and dramatically affects the manner of fighting it at each level.

The third principle of the AirLand battle attempts to address a problem that has confronted the Army since President Kennedy enshrined unconventional warfare as the wave of the future and caused a precipitous drop in

interest in the nuclear battlefield. Although the old FM 100-5 contained a chapter on tactical nuclear war and a segment on tactical weapons, they remained largely undigested lumps. The new doctrine, while not doing much better in terms of detail, clearly states the requirement for nuclear and chemical planning. Given the Threat's doctrine and capabilities, anything less would qualify as foolishness.

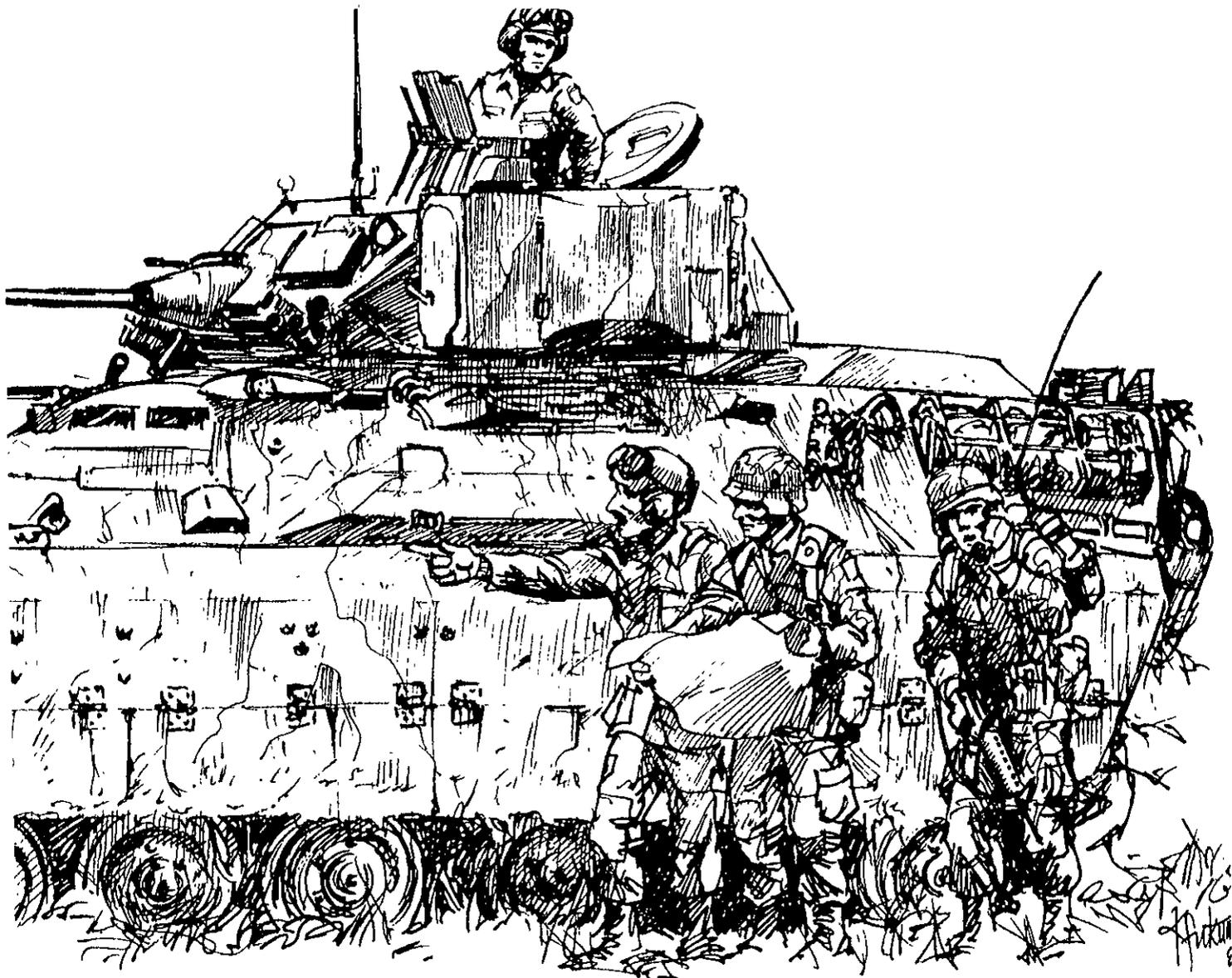
COROLLARIES

Nothing said thus far should provoke surprise or disagreement. But if the three principles can stand as propositions, then their corollaries should prove of intense interest and concern to the infantry officer. Stated simply, the requirement for deep attack leaves the infantry brigades and battalions with far less support in terms of aircraft and artillery than most infantrymen ever dreamed. It follows, then, that they must find ways to compensate.

The new doctrine charges the corps commander with the deepest battle and frankly acknowledges that air interdiction provides the primary weapon. Depending upon the situation — specifically, the amount of flexibility the corps commander has in positioning — some artillery units may find themselves allocated against this mission. Unquestionably, air assets will be scarce, particularly early in the battle. By doctrine, the Air Force concentrates first on air superiority. The assignment of deep interdiction missions will absorb some of the aircraft capable of performing both interdiction and close air support (F-4s now, but F-16s later). Furthermore, because they will operate beyond artillery range in most cases, some aircraft will have to be used to suppress an enemy's air defenses. Thus, fewer air assets will operate at the FLOT.

But the paring away of assets does not stop at the corps. The division commander must interdict units in his area of influence (15 to 70 kilometers from the FLOT in distance, 24 hours in time). Again, aircraft and artillery assets will have to carry the burden. The aircraft will most likely include armed helicopters, thus further depleting the assets infantry commanders have routinely counted on. Additionally, under both the old and the new doctrine, the division commander is responsible for counterfire and will have to allocate additional artillery against this requirement. Simple arithmetic, therefore, dictates that not much support remains.

Of course, the division commander does have the responsibility for providing close-in fire support. But the Field Artillery School, which trains the fire support coordinators, has clearly signaled its view of the situation: "Faced with the requirement to attack three distinct target sets concurrently, the division commander simply can't afford to farm away up to two-thirds of his field artillery for a single purpose." Recognizing that most divisions have only four organic artillery battalions, it becomes readily apparent that no brigade commander can assume he will have a direct support artillery bat-



talion committed totally to him. He may find that "his" artillery has been given higher priority targets elsewhere.

The infantry commander, of course, should not view this state of affairs with unalloyed horror. The premise underlying these requirements is that it improves rather than aggravates his problem at the FLOT. Numerous studies and simulations show that successful interdiction does reduce or delay the enemy forces that arrive at the FLOT. Similarly, counterfire increases the effectiveness of our own direct fire systems.

The deep battle and counterfire, though, really treat the cause (echeloned forces) rather than the symptom (the number of enemy soldiers arriving at the FLOT). The challenge is to keep the friendly units at the FLOT from perishing from the symptom. This is the challenge that confronts the brigade and battalion commanders and the operations officers most directly. They must find ways to compensate for the reduced support, because their task remains formidable; they must deal with the assault echelon regiments, which will prove the most difficult to counter, for they will arrive in combat formation, one-half to two-thirds of the force, augmented by most of the supporting artillery.

Under the old doctrine, the infantry commander could have expected to begin engaging the enemy's lead elements several kilometers from his position with a combination of close air support, armed helicopters, and artillery. While he may still have these available, there will be far fewer of them. Accordingly, three options come to mind: electronic warfare support, engineer support, and maneuver.

OPTIONS

For several years electronic warfare has been recognized as a form of combat power. Jamming assets available to U.S. forces tend to favor their use in the close-in battle. This, coupled with the decline in other support means, argues that our front-line commanders should have priority on the use of these assets. But commanders must carefully plan and time their use. If jamming is employed too early, an enemy can overcome it by switching frequencies or locating the sources and eliminating them. If used too late, jamming will also be ineffective. Properly used, jamming can destroy an

enemy's ability to coordinate his fire and maneuver elements, essential for any successful assault.

Similarly, engineer support favors close employment, and the infantry commander would do well to fight for his share of that support — it can aid his own mobility and survivability and hinder an enemy's movement. Skillfully placed obstacles such as tank traps or minefields will improve the effectiveness of all weapon systems. Bunkers and other defensive positions protect our own weapon systems and make them more effective by shielding the gunners from small arms fire and from shrapnel. Engineers can also improve a unit's mobility by clearing paths and filling ditches. Such support may prove crucial if the maneuver scheme calls for a rapid disengagement.

Every commander, needless to say, should have a maneuver scheme, and an infantry commander must focus on maneuver as a way of avoiding an enemy's strengths while attacking his weaknesses. The specifics will vary from one situation to another, but the need for a maneuver plan will remain constant. No longer can commanders think in terms of occupying a piece of terrain and holding it to the death, for that is exactly what will happen. They must use terrain, but as a means rather than an end.

CONTINUOUS PLANNING

Not all of the demands imposed by the new doctrine manifest themselves as requirements to offset reduced support. Some appear in the planning and fire coordination process. Most obviously, the requirement for continuous planning for nuclear and chemical fires will demand considerable attention. As the new doctrine suggests, these weapons have their greatest effectiveness when they are used against deep targets where an enemy's formations are most vulnerable and the effects on friendly forces are least. But the range of the present artillery-delivered weapons (under 30 kilometers) will limit the use of many of the tactical and chemical systems to within a reasonable distance of the FLOT.

Unfortunately, most U.S. officers are singularly ill-equipped either by mental preparation or tactical practice to get the most out of such weapons. The first task for all concerned, therefore, is to learn in detail the effects of nuclear weapons, as much for what they will not do as for what they will. Artillery-fired atomic projectiles have relatively small yields, and they require precise target information. Secondly, the infantry commander must thoroughly understand the release system and delivery constraints. If he simply leaves this issue to his artillery liaison officer, he may find himself without nuclear weapons when he most wants them.

A third point pertains to both conventional and unconventional weapons. Many artillerymen and even more (approaching most) infantrymen do not thoroughly understand the fire support process, although it probably

receives more lip service than any other aspect of the complex task posed by tomorrow's combat — that of orchestrating or synchronizing the battle. That the process is not well understood should surprise no one. All too often, the infantry and artillery train separately. When they do train together they plan separately. That is, the S-3 plans a maneuver and delivers it to the FSO, who then plans the support.

The system is also complex. In fact, the process of winnowing targets from masses of intelligence, comparing them against established priorities, and allocating them to delivery systems and munitions has outstripped the manual capability of the division artillery and fire support element. But the commander who would win must thoroughly understand the capabilities and limitations of the system.

PRIORITIES

Target priorities will weigh heavily in any future conflict. We will face more targets than we can kill, so we must shoot at the right ones. To comprehend the problem, one simply has to know that it is possible for a direct support artillery battalion to receive requests for fire from 36 sources. Granted, the company FIST and battalion fire support officer are responsible for directing traffic, but the commander's priorities of targets provide a critical element in effective fire distribution. In the absence of intelligent guidance from the maneuver commander, targets tend to be fired on a first-come basis, a process that will certainly waste scarce resources and jeopardize the firing unit for little or no real gain. The only solution to this problem is close and continuous practice between the commander's staff and his supporting elements. Command post exercises provide an ideal vehicle, but they must be frequent, well-planned, and fast-paced.

The new FM 100-5 and the TRADOC pamphlet do indeed herald significant changes for the infantryman. Under this doctrine, and contrary to our historical practice, he will have less with which to do his job. If all goes as planned, he will also have less to do, but still he must prepare to offset the loss in fire support assets by using creative maneuver, electronic warfare, and engineer support. He must also thoroughly acquaint himself with the procedures and effects of nuclear and chemical weapons. And he must study intensively the fire support system so that he can get the most out of his remaining assets. If he does all these things, he will have created the opportunity for victory.

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