



AUFTRAGSTAKTIK

By Captain Frank A. Kerkemeyer

The AirLand Battle of the future will be characterized by high mobility, high lethality, and nonlinear operations. As the fog of war sets in and communications fail, success will depend to a large extent upon the ability of junior leaders to take the initiative, fight the battle, and exploit opportunities.

If we are to train as we will fight, then our command climate needs to embrace a system or concept that will develop these abilities in our junior leaders. Such a concept is the German *Auftragstaktik*, which is basically a command and control procedure. This concept, well proved in peace and war, is now used by the Bundeswehr (the Army of the Federal Republic of Germany), along with a command climate that promotes its use.

From the German point of view there are only two command and control procedures—mission-oriented and order-oriented. To understand the mission-oriented, we must first look at the concept known as *Auftragstaktik*.

This concept is part of a larger picture that encompasses the ideas of mission-oriented orders and *Fuehren durch Auftrage* (leading by missions). In its

simplest form, *Auftragstaktik* can be described as a process in which the superior assigns his subordinate mission without providing him the step-by-step "how-to's," which then become the subordinate's responsibility.

Thus, the subordinate is allowed to develop a variety of solutions to a single problem and, after evaluating them, to choose the best one and supervise the execution of it. The manner in which a mission should be performed always depends upon the tactical situation and the status of a unit's personnel and equipment. The subordinate who has full knowledge of these factors therefore is able to take the initiative and make on-the-spot decisions, within the commander's intent. This does not dispense with objective-oriented supervision, but the superior intervenes only if the manner of execution endangers his intentions.

In a broader view, the concept is characterized by a distinct relationship between the superior and the subordinate. The superior determines the objective to be achieved and assigns a clearly defined mission. He makes sure the subordinate has available to him the forces, the resources, and the authority he will need to

accomplish the mission. Additionally, the superior provides information concerning his own superior's concept of the operation and lays down details only to the extent necessary for coordination within a broad scope. This need for coordination particularly applies to interaction with forces that are not subordinate to the commander executing the mission or to resources that are not immediately available to him.

The subordinate is given considerable latitude in the way he executes the mission. He uses his own initiative to develop his operation plan and determines the necessary details. Whatever he may do, he remains committed to the substance of his mission and to the concept of operation of the higher level of command. (As said in German, "The mission is sacred to him.") He combines obedience with thinking in broader terms and with a willingness to assume responsibility. Great demands are made on his leadership ability, his initiative, his power of enforcement, and his professional qualifications.

At the same time and in view of the number of people involved and their relatively unfettered freedom of action, the superior can expect mistakes to happen. Mistakes are looked at as learning tools to develop subordinates without destroying them.

When using order-oriented tactics (*Befehlstaktik*), on the other hand, the accomplishment of an assigned mission is ordered down to the last detail. This does indeed increase the uniformity of action for the accomplishment of certain missions, but it also restricts the subordinate's initiative and freedom of action and reduces flexibility. Above all, it does not meet the requirements of fluid situations that develop during operations, particularly when major mechanized forces are involved.

Order-oriented tactics also try to adopt a continuously centralized method of command and control that, because of the detailed orders, also requires a centralized mode of supervision. Because of modern information and communication systems, there is a constant danger that orders and requests for information may bypass intermediate levels in the chain of command.

DISASTER

The Bundeswehr believes that *failing* to use the concept of *Auftragstaktik* is a recipe for disaster, and feels that history has often borne out this idea.

Today, *Auftragstaktik* works for the Bundeswehr because of a combination of certain characteristics of its personnel and training systems, coupled with a command climate in its schools and units that reinforces it.

To begin with, the Bundeswehr is a conscript Army. All new recruits for a company report in on the same day and, depending on the type of unit, are discharged on the same day 15 months later. The officers

and NCOs serve as cadre and have longer tours and enlistments. For instance, a typical company command tour is four years, which limits personnel turbulence among leaders.

Another important consideration is that all officers were first NCOs, have had the same training courses as their NCOs, and have served, to a limited extent, in NCO duty positions. This provides for a better understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and general experience of leaders at each level.

Finally, the Bundeswehr has a common training plan (*Gemeinsamer Ausbildung Plan*, or GAP), which quarterly outlines the training requirements by topic and hours of instruction for each type of unit but allows a commander and his subordinate leaders significant flexibility in the way they go about accomplishing the training.

There is no doubt that this stability and common training background contribute to success. The primary reason for that success, however, is the climate within both the school and the units that allows a philosophy such as *Auftragstaktik* to be taught and practiced.

RED FLAG

Auftragstaktik is a red flag that runs through all Bundeswehr doctrine down to the lowest level, including branch specific manuals. It has its origin in the Bundeswehr's HDv 100/200 Army Command and Control System, which states that the mission should leave the subordinate commander as much freedom of execution as possible.

The German Army believes that *Auftragstaktik* must be related to an overall training concept. For it to work, it must be a philosophy that is ingrained in all leaders from the beginning and must be based on a uniform Army-wide understanding of doctrine and specific tactical techniques and methods (the way to cross a river, for example). The school and unit training system is oriented toward providing this level of common understanding. As a result, one will usually hear the same approach articulated by commanders of various units on such generic subjects as creating a defensive position or reducing an obstacle.

Beginning with the instruction in the branch schools, soldiers are indoctrinated in the concept of *Auftragstaktik*, and it is practiced continually. This is true in all the schools, beginning with the NCO candidates, who are taught to understand the commander's intent. In fact, the soldiers' training relies heavily on their reacting to given situations without the benefit of detailed "how-to" instructions. They are taught the four principles of dealing with any situation: Estimate the situation; plan possible courses of action within the commander's intent and choose the best one; issue orders; and supervise the execution.

This basic concept is then reinforced through the rest of the NCO's development in both garrison and

field situations. For example, at the Supplemental NCO Course, soldiers equivalent in rank to our corporals and sergeants are given a variety of garrison situational exercises to play out, such as a Charge of Quarters handling a drunken soldier. An NCO is given complete latitude in developing his solution. The exercises are videotaped, and then the soldier is critiqued by his peers and the instructor on his employment of the four principles in dealing with the situation.

The method of tactical instruction used in the branch schools also reflects a concern for *Auftragstaktik*. Most of the instruction is done by the students in the course, and the students rotate through the leadership position the course is designed to train. For example, all students attending a squad leader's course hold the position of squad leader for a squad of their fellow students one or more times during the course.

While holding this position, a student is given tasks to teach the others and has access to classrooms, training aids and, if needed, vehicles and a training area. He is not given specific details or a lesson plan on what to teach. The course monitor allows the student the freedom to teach the tasks as he sees fit. The course monitor serves only as a mentor to the student leader, advising him at various points on what he did well and what he could have done better. During the training, the student-instructor also acts as mentor for his fellow students.

The idea of always giving the leader the flexibility to devise his own solution is seen in tactical training in schools, because this training does not generally include maneuver drills (as defined by the U.S. Army). Bundeswehr leaders seem hesitant to use tactical battle or maneuver drills, because they feel a drill, once it is initiated, leaves little control to the squad leader. They believe that, during World War II, German Army squad leaders, because of drill training, too often acted out of instinct, and with disastrous results. Bundeswehr NCOs today are therefore taught to use only common sense and initiative in formulating a solution and then acting upon it.

The concept of *Auftragstaktik* continues up through the officer courses. In the German school system, an officer is first taught to develop a logical thought process for solving tactical problems through the use of the estimate of the situation.

Next, he is trained to conduct tactical operations by using only short, concise orders. He receives orders that address only the forces available, the space he can use and the time for the mission to begin. This allows him maximum flexibility in the performance of his

mission within the intent of the next higher commander. As long as he stays within the bounds of his intent, there is no "school solution." The emphasis is on orders that address the essence of the requirement.

Unit training also reflects a focus on *Auftragstaktik*. At the unit, training requirements and taskings take the form of mission-type orders, and leaders develop their own solutions to them. For example, the GAP might indicate there is to be four hours of map reading in accordance with Regulation X. A company commander blocks out an appropriate amount of time on his unit training schedule and designates an instructor. The instructor, knowing the needs of his soldiers, writes the lesson plan; chooses the necessary training aids and the training area; selects an evaluation method; and conducts the training.

Auftragstaktik is also seen in the routine day-to-day operations of a unit. The company cook who has the mission to prepare the noon meal, for example, has his meal plan and recipe book to serve as a guide, but these are not considered concrete instructions. He may put an additional spice in the recipe for flavor or buy a seasonal fruit or vegetable to substitute for another, if it is more cost effective.

The climate of the Bundeswehr is one in which this concept of *Auftragstaktik* can be found in any part of the garrison training or field exercises. Overall, it works very well, because it is taught and practiced throughout.

The U.S. Army, by contrast, espouses the idea of *Auftragstaktik* but in practice does not seem to encourage its use. The result is junior leaders who are not encouraged to act on their own initiative. If our Army wants leaders who will take the initiative, fight the battle, and exploit opportunities, it will need to establish a climate that supports these desires, much as the German Army has done.

We first need to determine what must be done to incorporate a concept such as this into unit level operations—specifically, a command climate that fosters it and a unit training program that practices it. Then we should embed it into the school environment so as to produce leaders for the field who will practice it routinely. Only then will efforts in these areas develop the type of leaders needed for the future AirLand Battle.

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