

Fire and Maneuver Effects

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Fire and maneuver effects (FME) are the effects you seek to subject an enemy to as a result of either actual or threatened use of weapons and movement relative to your adversary. Correctly understood and applied, they can defeat any enemy in any type of conflict or even law enforcement scenario.

While it is possible to identify a whole myriad of effects that fire and maneuver may create, it is really only useful to focus on four. These are:

- Surprise
- Shock
- Suppression
- Isolation

Before we examine each in detail, it is essential to understand the following common characteristics of each. They are all psychological. They cannot be applied against anything or anyone that is not fundamentally human. You cannot shock and surprise anything inert.

All these effects are temporary, and none are absolute. What works once may not work again. The defining aspect of their effectiveness is how well they are applied. In very simple terms, it does not matter what you do to an enemy, as long as it is surprising, shocking, and suppresses and isolates him. Nor are all four effects required. Any one of the effects, sufficiently applied, is enough to create defeat.

It is also vitally important, that troops learn how to inoculate themselves against FME. This should be constantly emphasized through coherent logical training. There is little point in teaching someone that good defense requires 360 degrees of observation to guard against being surprised, and then on another exercise informing them that the enemy will be coming from a specific direction.

Surprise

Surprise is caused by unpreparedness for combat. This unpreparedness has three defining characteristics in that an enemy may be unprepared for combat by virtue of the following:

Time: The enemy does not expect to be attacked at the time that it occurs. Thus, his readiness to engage in combat is low. He may be sleeping, conducting maintenance or engaged in some activity that reduces his capability to fight.

Direction: The enemy does not expect an attack from that direction. He may well have been prepared for combat, but he expected the attack to come from a different direction.

Nature: The enemy is expecting to be attacked, but he is unprepared to face an attack of the kind launched. It is either by far larger numbers than he expected, or he is facing equipment such as tanks and artillery that he did not expect to encounter.

Surprise leverages combat power like no other effect. It is perfectly possible for a section or squad to route a company or even battalion, and military history is full of such examples. The critical aspect of surprise, as with all FME is that it is temporary and can be quickly recovered from.

As previously mentioned, troops must be taught how to prevent themselves being surprised, either in time, direction or nature. The key to this is information, in that there must be continuous effort to conduct observation and surveillance, to protect one's own troops from attack.

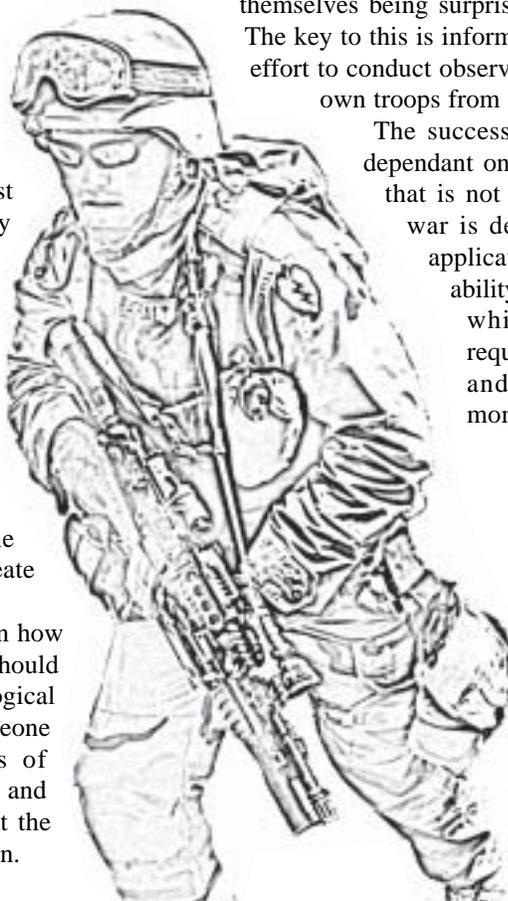
The successful application of surprise is usually dependant on making the enemy believe something that is not true. The Sun-Tsu statement that "all war is deception" is essentially true, and the application of surprise is reliant on this. The ability to maneuver to a position of advantage, while remaining undetected, is a key requirement in gaining surprise, as is swift and decisive action, at an unexpected moment.

Shock

Shock is very closely related to surprise, but also distinct from it. What is surprising may not be shocking and vice versa. Shock is characterized by the victim's inability to process information and therefore make coherent rational decisions leading to effective action. It can affect individuals and organizations equally, and often with catastrophic results.

The inability to process information comes from fear, and fear comes from real or perceived danger. The most likely thing to cause shock is a rapid accumulation of casualties or equipment loss. A platoon can lose eight men over a week, and not suffer shock. The loss of all eight men in a mine explosion will almost certainly cause shock to the platoon, especially if that mine, was used by the enemy to trigger an ambush.

However, it is not wholly accurate to suggest that shock is purely a function of casualty rate. Fundamentally, shock comes from the belief that you are suffering casualties, regardless of the actual truth. The inability to collect accurate information as to the actual situation will further compound that belief. Most human beings



deprived of critical information, will either freeze, as in being unable to act, or act irrationally, as in running away.

Drills are often seen as helping inoculate troops against shock. That is, troops carry out a set of action as an automatic response to a threat. While this may have some merit, it is equally possible that it may compound the error, especially if the enemy is aware of the likely drilled response. An example of this is the teaching in some armies that if ambushed, troops should automatically assault into the enemy ambush. Obviously, such a response is easily countered and is usually accounted for.

Shock is best applied through the use of speed, both in terms of movement and engagements. Once engaged, the faster you can move and/or inflict casualties the greater the likelihood is that you will inflict shock on your enemy. Obviously, you can apply shock from a static position, but your ability to exploit or maximize the effect is limited.

Suppression

Suppression is the lack of action caused by the desire to avoid harm. Primarily it is often associated with an effect created by direct and indirect fire, in that Soldiers quite literally do not move or shoot back because they fear injury or death from incoming fire. The whole premise of fire and maneuver is predicated on suppression. However there are two distinct forms of suppression and both need to be understood.

Active suppression is the use of fire to prevent an enemy from conducting an activity. That is usually that it prevents him from either firing or maneuvering. The fire can be direct or indirect. The fire is applied in the appropriate volume to suppress the enemy, while another activity is carried out. Here, two important things need to be noted. First, there is no point in suppressing an enemy unless you are doing something else as well, be it maneuvering against him, withdrawing, and/or resupplying. Shooting at him for no reason is pointless and wastes ammunition. Second, suppression is purely a function of belief that a weapon can do harm, so it doesn't really matter if you are firing 5.56mm or 7.62mm as long as the enemy will take cover and not shoot back. In WW2, the Wehrmacht used 9mm to suppress very effectively. A 60mm mortar

bomb can suppress as well as a 81mm can. If the enemy is suppressed, he can't shoot back; then you are free to maneuver against him.

The other form of suppression is passive. This is the actual or threatened punishment of activity. "Stop or I'll shoot," is passive suppression and implicitly the *raison d'être* of every weapon ever built. Weapons are not solely meant to kill. They aim to coerce human beings into a course of behavior. Understanding passive suppression is vital. Pointing your weapon at enemy who are surrendering is passive suppression, as is the open carriage of arms by policemen.

One sniper can suppress four men in a trench if each time they try to look out they are shot at. More importantly, whole units can be passively suppressed if they fear that any activity on their part will reveal their presence and thus invite attack. Thus, passive suppression can be delivered purely by observation and without the use of fire!

Isolation

Suppression can create isolation. The aim of isolation is to subject the enemy to the belief that he has no assistance, supply, or rescue. The only way he will survive, or get aid for his comrades, is to surrender. Human beings are naturally gregarious, and warfare is a group activity. It requires numbers of men. Furthermore, we know that the vast majority of human beings derive a great deal of courage and comfort from other human beings. How else would the serried ranks of Napoleonic infantry advance into the guns of another army? By depriving groups of Soldiers from those things they both need and desire to continue to mount a resistance, you can effectively break the will and cohesion needed to fight. Military history abounds with examples of large numbers of men being captured, purely by virtue of having been surrounded, or in some cases believing they had been surrounded, when in fact they had not.

On 23-25 April 1951 in Korea, the 1st Battalion, the Gloucestershire Regiment, fought hard and bravely on Gloucester Hill in Korea. Casualties were 59 dead, 180 wounded and 526 prisoners. Effectively, the whole battalion was killed, wounded, or made prisoner.

On 21 March 1918, the 16th Manchesters in the Manchester Redoubt

suffered 73 dead, about three times that wounded, and the whole battalion, with a reported strength of about 700, made prisoner.

On 30 January 1944, the 1st and 3rd U.S. Army Ranger Battalions were surrounded during a failed infiltration at Cisterna di Latina in Italy. After heavy fighting, only six men out of 767 managed to escape. While the number of dead and wounded was significant, it is estimated that more than 500 were captured.

Why is this? Simply, most people's will to live is very strong, and in most cases, stronger than it is to die. Surrendering or withdrawing are all ways of prolonging life.

In almost every major battle in history, far more men have surrendered or run, than been killed or wounded. Obviously, there are exceptions to this, but their notoriety is almost certainly born from the fact that they are unusual; the last stands of Custer at Little Big Horn and the Spartans at Themoplye being two well-known examples. It is worth noting that in both these cases, that the commander of the annihilated force was physically present, and that both actions were part of a larger action. It is commonly suggested that in both cases, all fought to the death partly because of the presence of their commander, and also because the act of surrender was physically impossible because of the proximity of the combat, and thus individual acts of surrender could not happen.

The primary purpose of fire and maneuver is to create these effects on the enemy, and just as importantly, it helps to understand that the enemy will seek to subject you to the same effects.

The skill of any unit will be how well they apply these effects relative to the enemy they are facing.

It is also critical to understand that these effects can be applied in any type of operation, be it all out war or peacekeeping, and can, under exceptional conditions, result in the enemy being defeated without a shot being fired!

William F. Owen joined the British Army in 1981 and served in both regular and territorial units until 1993. He is currently a broadcaster and writer specializing in armed conflict and military thought. He is currently developing an alternative view of small unit tactical doctrine. This article stems from that work. He is also the author of *Blackfoot Is Missing*.
