

IDEAS and ISSUES

Candid professionally oriented comments on matters of interest to Marines. Particularly invited are new ideas that enhance the mission and esprit of the Marine Corps. Length: 500-1,500 words.



Operational Concepts

Training the Fleet Marine Force

by LtGen Alfred M. Gray, Jr.

Earlier this year, LtGen Alfred M. Gray, Jr., commanding general, Fleet Marine Force Atlantic, and now designated to become 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps on 1 July, spoke to the Marine Corps Command and Staff College about matters of key importance in preparing Marine units for combat. Here are some extracts from that talk.

There are several things we emphasize in all our training to prepare Fleet Marine Force Atlantic forces for combat. I want to mention some of these today and give you some insight into what we think will be crucial for success on tomorrow's battlefield. Here they are in brief outline form and in no particular order of priority in terms of importance:

- You have to be able to do the entire surveillance, reconnaissance, and target acquisition function—and this includes the entire signal intelligence/electronic warfare area and all that it involves—better and quicker than the enemy or you are not going to win. So we stress those activities in every exercise.

- The same applies to combined arms, and the term includes all forms of air support. If you are not better than your enemy in every aspect of combined arms, you are going to be thumped and thumped badly.... All leaders in the force right down to the platoon leader, the tank commander, and the engineer squad leader must be able to call in air, naval gunfire, and artillery.

- We believe that you live on the battlefield by a combination of maneuver and firepower, and we stress maneuver style operations. The intent of commanders must be known a couple of echelons up and down the chain of command. This is the only way sergeants and platoon leaders are going to be able to act and seize opportunities in an uncertain environment. We think and execute as Marine air-ground task forces (MAGTFs)—the point (or focus) of main effort can be from the ground combat element (GCE) or the air combat element

(ACE). We use mission type orders and mission tactics. We teach through critiques—big, free-wheeling critiques at which junior officers and noncommissioned officers talk about what they did and the thought processes that led them to do it. We are trying to teach better thought processes... and it is working.

- Command, control, and communications—C³ or more accurately C³I, as it must encompass integrated, all-source intelligence—are played by both sides in all major exercises. You've got to be able to control your forces and influence the action better, quicker, and more effectively than the enemy. You've got to be able to use combat information and get inside the ability of your opponent to act. The only way you learn to do this, whether you are a private or a general, is to practice it in an environment of uncertainty.

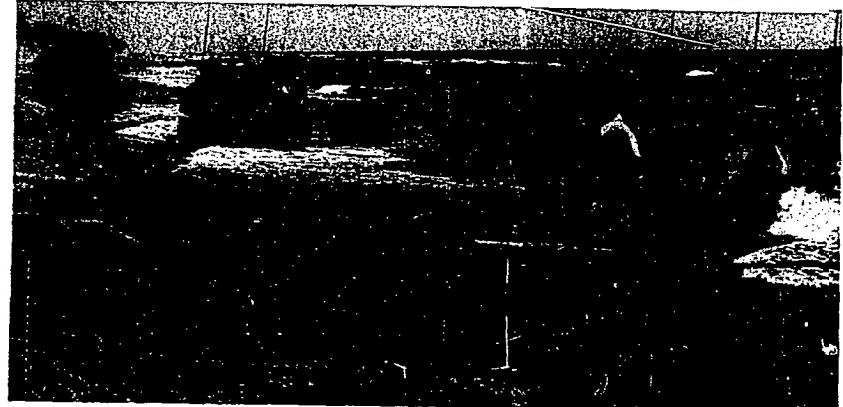
- Because uncertainty is a dominant characteristic of war—the one thing we can promise you about combat—all our exercises are free maneuver, force on force. This provides realistic uncertainty in training and ensures that things rarely happen the way anybody expects them to.

- Everybody in the ground combat element must go through our combat engineer school and learn about mines, boobytraps, obstacles, and the like. Knowing about these things is what can keep friendly forces moving and

help deny mobility to the enemy. We test our combat engineer capabilities—give them a workout—in each of our exercises as well.

- As a goal, half of all our operations and training must be conducted at night. This is a rapidly changing aspect of warfare, and we had better be prepared to cope with it. Of course, you can't operate all the time at night—you have to be realistic—but we shoot for about half.

- NBC. The chemical business is here to stay, and we simply must be able to operate in a chemical environment. This includes thinking about chemical warfare and about employing chemical weapons effectively. It also includes using mission-oriented protective posture equipment, putting on your gas mask within nine seconds, and wearing your chemical protective clothing while you repair a Cobra or work on a truck. And let's not forget the nuclear battlefield. Lord knows we don't want that kind of an environment, but we have to be prepared for it. I submit that if you assume you'll be fighting in a nuclear environment—if you spread out, disperse your installations, conduct maneuver, move your formations, and all that—you'll be better off. You'll be learning how to operate in greater areas with fewer people, and you'll be solving some of your rear area security problems. So there is a little spinoff on the nuclear



side. What we're saying here is that NBC is important. It must be played heavily and realistically in every major exercise.

• We must remember our Fleet Marine Forces are like no other organizations in the world. They are a reservoir of combined arms power. When we are given a mission, we reach into these reservoirs and take only what is necessary to do what must be done. We call it "task organization," and we must be masters at this. We must know where our items are; we must maximize the use of our various manual and computer-assisted information systems so we can tailor support for the forces chosen. As we select our forces and plan our operations, we must maintain, concurrently, a logistics estimate of the situation. We must understand how logistics can impact on our concepts of operation. In all our exercises, we must play realistic and flexible logistics. Commanders must base all their concepts of operations on what they know they can do logically. They must have a logistics point of main effort that reinforces or supports the operational main effort.

• Our people spend a lot of time training and operating with the other Services and with our Allies. We teach joint/combined operational campaign thinking, planning, and execution as part of our Force Annual Campaign Plan. This plan is our roadway. It provides focus for II MAF and drives all schedules, training exercises, employment planning, and related activities.

These are a few of the things—a few of the basic operational/training ideas, if you will—that we are stressing on a day-to-day basis in all our exercises, seminars, and wargames. There are others I could have mentioned. We also stress the importance of ground-based air defense; operational security; medical support operations; tactical deception; rear area security; and, of course, mobility—both strategic and tactical. But this gives you an idea of how all training must be oriented around battlefield realities. **USMC**



Training in II MAF under LtGen Alfred M. Gray, Jr., focuses on battlefield realism.

