

# COMMANDER'S HATCH

## Your Mind Is Your Primary Weapon



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For more than forty years, military analysts have predicted the coming of “push-button war” where experts wearing white laboratory coats monitor super-sophisticated machines capable of conducting target acquisition and attack without the need for human intervention.

With the 1991 Persian Gulf War, there were glimmerings that this era had arrived. Carefully-chosen footage of “smart” munitions selectively destroying bridges or flying through specific windows of a building showed a world where guesswork was removed, human error eliminated, and perfect execution mastered. Best of all, it looked safe and easy. Unfortunately, this perception is not true. No matter how sophisticated the world becomes, warfare will never be safe, easy, or sterile. War will be dirty, bloody, dangerous, and very, very difficult.

America's Army is committed to using information age technology to provide a rapid and accurate common view of the battlefield to the combined-arms team. The mounted force was the first to appreciate the value and importance of applying advanced technology to all elements of the combined arms team to make combat operations more effective. The Army will field the best equipment money can buy to win on the battlefields of the 21st Century. But at the same time, we must understand that advanced technology alone will not solve all of our problems. I believe that the best weapon available to the mounted force is one that already exists between the ears of our soldiers — the brain. A trained and educated mind is the most important weapon on the battlefield today and will be well into the future.

It is easy to be impressed by the technology of the M1A2 Abrams tank. Its accurate main gun, its thermal sights and computerized fire control, its powerful engine, and its digital architecture are the best in the world. But, without the four crewmen who have the knowledge, courage, and desire to close with and destroy the en-

emy, all of the attributes of this great fighting machine will be wasted.

Machines are tools, and tools are only as good as the minds that guide them. Even a Cray supercomputer cannot tell its operator that he asked the wrong question, or is using the answer in the wrong way. The words and symbols on the IVIS screen cannot convey emotions, urgency, fear, pain, weariness, or excitement.

The mind of the tank commander must convert the information that his IVIS screen provides into action, based on the situation and his commander's intent. The capabilities resident in advanced technology combat platforms can only influence the situation when the crewmen think and take action. We in the mounted force must recognize the requirement for the long-term development of brain power in order to prepare for the challenges of future operations. Our warfighters must develop new technical-tactical skills to master the many new nuances of digital warfighting.

Mastery of warfighting on the next battlefield will require new ways of thinking and operating, in part, because everyone in a digital organization will have the information to make and execute tactical decisions. The situational awareness that comes with increased information flow enables truly decentralized execution. This increases the need for individual imaginative thinking and initiative. The more sophisticated our machines become, the more important it is that we pay attention to our primary weapon — the minds of the soldiers that guide these machines. Only then will we optimize our weapon systems.

Technology bridges the gap between our unaided abilities and a given task. Adapting technology for mounted warfighting results in being able to perform tasks better and faster, and more importantly, performing tasks that were previously impossible. Our greatest challenge today will be to identify and train on tasks that before were impossible to perform.

A laser rangefinder is an example of how technology takes an existing task and makes it easier. The physical task itself — measuring the distance to the target — has not changed. However, the technology simply makes it faster and more accurate, and requires less effort from the crewman. The ability to range to a target and then transmit that information directly to an artillery piece or to a wingman instantaneously is an example of a task that was impossible to do previously, but which can now be performed in minutes. The trick is to understand where and how to apply this capability to tactical situations...to understand the possibilities for a better way of fighting.

For the first time ever, current technology permits a friendly force commander to know precisely where his unit is in relation to other friendly and enemy forces on the battlefield. Before now, this had been so difficult and time-consuming that we used pre-arranged control measures — unit boundaries, directions of attack, limits of advance — to keep ourselves organized, because it was impossible to see the battlefield *in real time*. Information age technology gives us the capability to see the battlefield in real time. Now, instead of controlling units to operate within rigid, pre-determined boundaries, we have the potential to move units over multiple routes to attack an enemy from many disparate locations. The possibilities for future combat operations given such capabilities are limited only by our intellect.

Nothing can take the place of thinking soldiers on the ground who understand how to use their equipment. Equipment may fail; but, minds can improvise, make allowances and adjust. War is a contest in which the side with the wits and will to win will prevail. We clearly have the best equipment on the battlefield. Our strength as an Army and our success on future battlefields will depend on how well we can train our minds to use this equipment. We must prepare our leaders' minds to fight on the digital battlefields of tomorrow...