

# Maneuvering The Enemy

by Captain Charles D. Starbird



The dream is always the same... I am sitting through the after-action review at the end of a lost battle. Though most of my staff is half asleep, somehow I am still awake, probably because I am still angry.

They cheated! The OPFOR had so many unfair advantages. They seemed to know just where to attack us. The OCs probably told them what our plan was. It couldn't possibly have been my fault...

The senior observer/controller is telling us that we are a bunch of losers. That's some AAR technique this guy has: "Beating the OPFOR at the National Training Center is tough to do. Losers at the NTC criticize the advantages that the OPFOR has, including familiarity with the terrain and numerical superiority. They claim foremost that the 'real' enemy is not as good as the OPFOR, which is probably true. Our experiences in Southwest Asia seemed to uphold this idea. But it is also possible that we are cheating ourselves, that someday we could fight a well-trained, well-disciplined enemy with good equipment on his home ground. Hopefully, we would do better than most units do at the NTC."

I hate this guy already.

He starts to lecture us, and suddenly his face changes and he looks just like my old AOAC instructor (which is allowed to happen in dreams, I guess). His voice assumes that sleep-inducing tone that I remember from many tactics classes years ago.

"Sun Tzu wrote, 'All warfare is based on deception.' Current Army doctrine recognizes surprise as a principle of

war, but our operational manuals give little guidance on how to achieve it. Another wise man once said that a commander can lose a battle, but only his soldiers can win it. Solid execution of the commander's intent is usually the most critical factor in the outcome of any battle. Unfortunately, all too often at the NTC the commander *does* lose the battle, despite the valiant efforts of his troops. A study of generalship illustrates a quality found in great commanders that our doctrine does not attempt to cultivate; for lack of a better term, I will call it the ability to 'maneuver the enemy.'

"FM 100-5 defines maneuver as the combination of fire and movement to obtain a 'positional advantage' over an enemy. Normally, we think of maneuver in terms of moving *our forces* to gain that positional advantage in order to destroy the enemy or accomplish our mission. Unfortunately, the enemy's ability to move his forces often thwarts our attempts to outmaneuver him. This may seem like an obvious point, but many commanders fail to take the enemy's free will into account when they are planning their schemes of maneuver. Sometimes the commander is led astray by his staff. Intelligence officers (S2s) are trained to predict the enemy's courses of action based on information that is often sketchy at best. Sometimes the enemy's movements are oriented on a specific terrain objective, but many times the enemy is only concerned with destroying our forces. The prediction that the enemy will come down a certain avenue of approach can lead the commander to take risk elsewhere. The enemy will then move his forces to exploit those weaknesses which his recon

elements identify. The S2 who only looks at terrain and ignores disposition of friendly forces in his analysis of enemy courses of action is setting his commander and the entire unit up for failure."

Looking two seats to my right, I see my S2 weeping uncontrollably. To my left, my S3 is shaking his head and muttering "We should have wargamed it," over and over. Finally I have someone else to blame. I am about to rise up and defend myself when the OC speaks again:

"One way to impede the enemy's freedom to maneuver is to destroy his recon. If he doesn't know where you are, he cannot exploit your weaknesses. The OPFOR relies heavily on recon. One good technique that you used to deny his recon was positioning a large counter-recon force forward. Although this was a complicated operation, your soldiers executed it very well, and it could have forced the enemy to choose a course of action without complete information. Unfortunately, it was impossible to know if you had destroyed all of his recon elements, and if you did get them all, he could have just sent out some more. That is exactly what happened — one dismounted recon team called in all of your positions and obstacles. Thus, recon denial is only a partial solution to the problem of maneuvering the enemy."

Now I know for sure that this is a dream because an OC almost told us that we did something right. Suddenly, his uniform changes, melting away in a flash of light. As my eyes readjust, his face changes again and I am staring at Napoleon! He starts in French, but

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changes to English in mid-sentence, "...so another way to influence the enemy's maneuver is to employ a deception plan. Current U.S. maneuver doctrine promotes the use of deception mainly in the role of force protection prior to battle. Deception at the strategic and operational levels is emphasized over tactical deception. Planners at brigade and task force level seem to see deception as an unnecessary complication and usually only plan it to support other deception plans from higher. Nevertheless, a successful deception plan can 'maneuver the enemy' to a position of disadvantage, allowing friendly forces to maneuver to destroy him. The key is to influence the enemy's decision-making process, convincing him to choose the course of action you want him to choose. One way to accomplish this is to portray strength where you *don't* want him to go by using obstacles, fake battle positions, false radio traffic, and denial of recon. At the same time, portray weakness where you *do* want him to go by allowing his recon and lead elements initial success there. This is exactly the tactic that I used in 1805 at Austerlitz to defeat a much-larger enemy force. Read about it sometime!"

I hate reading history, but I make a note to do a little research. I vaguely recall studying that battle in school — Napoleon tricked Alexander into ex-

posing a flank, effectively maneuvering his enemy to a poor position and then annihilating him. Maybe with some more guidance, my staff could have created a deception plan. I decide to try it next time.

In the blink of a very tired eye, Napoleon becomes General George S. Patton. He looks a lot like George C. Scott. He continues with great vigor: "The last key to maneuvering the enemy is retaining flexibility. The deception plan must be combined with the flexibility to react if the enemy chooses a different course of action than the one you intend him to. A quick, lethal reserve is essential in order to mass your combat power at the critical place and time. You must plan all of the possible contingencies and identify the decision points for them. The reserve must rehearse and be prepared to execute all of them. Do not leave your reserve with the mission to destroy 'leakers' though the defense; the reserve is meant to be committed to the main fight. Remember, the enemy will mass his combat power, to include artillery and air assets, at one point to penetrate your defense. You must, either make him choose the point *you* want, or be flexible enough to get to the point he chooses with enough combat power to win. Covering all of the possible avenues is not enough; you must decisively defeat his main effort!"

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Suddenly, he vanishes. The generator outside dies, and the AAR van goes dark.

I am shaken awake by my executive officer, "Nap's over, Sir. We have an intel update for you. Looks like they're attacking a little earlier than we expected. The S3 is waiting for you behind Alpha Team. Your crew has the tank cranked. Good luck, Sir."

The sun is coming up as I ride out over the desert toward the artillery fire already pounding my main effort team. Rubbing my eyes as the sand blows into my face, I wonder what I was dreaming about. Four phrases keep buzzing through my head: maneuver the enemy!... deny recon!... use deception!... retain flexibility! I have no idea why they keep coming to mind, but it must have been a really bad nightmare — I feel like I didn't sleep at all.