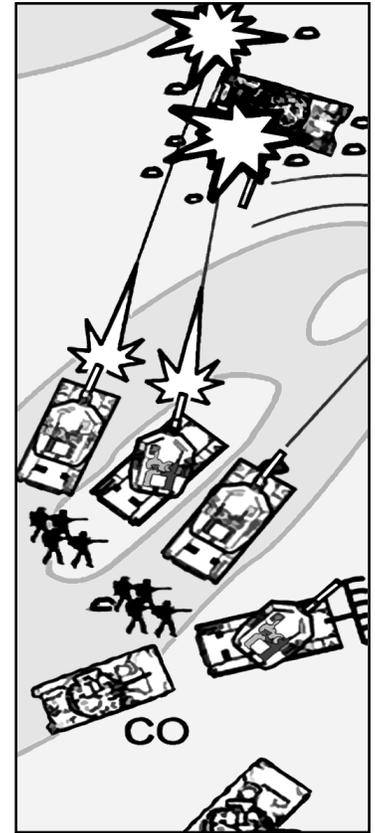


Victory in the Red Zone

by Captain Bill A. Papanastasiou

Alpha Company, a mechanized infantry company team, advanced westward at less than moderate speed. Not more than a few hours short of LD, Alpha Company had assumed the advance guard for the task force. The team commander decided there was little time for a proper intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) or rehearsals. However, he did remember that the battalion staff reported that a reinforced enemy combat security outpost (CSOP) lay less than four kilometers away. Meanwhile, the task force commander barked into the team commander's ear to slow down so he would not separate from the obscured main body. The tremendous dust clouds kicked up by the advancing Alpha Company had blinded the rest of the task force traveling in the diamond formation.

Suddenly, two of 3rd platoon's Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles (BIFVs) catastrophically exploded in balls of flame due to enemy direct fire. At the same time, heavy artillery landed all around the advancing team, causing great confusion. Friendly vehicles were firing in every direction and moving every which way. A tank from 1st platoon accidentally fired on and destroyed a 3rd platoon BIFV. On the left flank, 2nd platoon, with four BIFVs and mounted infantry, tried to advance along a tree line, which ran parallel to the team's axis of advance. In a shower of anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs), originating from inside the tree line, the platoon lost three vehicles and their mounted infantry in seconds. The platoon leader failed to clear the tree line before advancing. Watching in horror, the team commander realized he had lost total control of the situation. He also regretted not conducting his own, thorough IPB prior to LD. As it turned out, the CSOP was actually one kilometer closer than intelligence had reported. Clearly, the entire team fell right into the enemy kill sack. In less than five minutes, Alpha Company lost seven BIFVs and two tanks to direct and flanking ATGM fire and mines. The fact that the enemy destroyed nine of Alpha Company's 14 combat vehicles made it combat ineffective. To make matters worse, the entire CSOP withdrew within the defending motorized rifle battalion's defensive line without any losses.



As alarming as this example may be, one is more shocked to learn that such failures occur repeatedly to company teams deploying to the combat training centers, especially the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California.¹ Company teams are failing to show proficiency in critical collective tasks, such as direct fire planning and execution, killing with lethal direct fires, executing effective actions on contact, using proper movement formations and techniques based on terrain and enemy situation, and exploiting the effects of combined arms. Concerning the latter, the unplanned use or the misuse of dismounted infantry is most common. Thus our company teams seldom achieve the degree of tactical initiative needed to force the enemy to conform to our commander's operational purposes and tempo, while retaining freedom of action.² This inability to impose our will on the enemy results in our reacting to *his* terms of battle, giving him the advantage of dictating when and where to fight. In order

to reverse this trend, our tank and mechanized infantry company teams must aggressively and effectively execute maneuver when in contact with the enemy. They must close with and destroy the enemy with massed lethal fires from all combined arms assets, while at the same time securing and preserving their own combat power and successfully accomplishing the team's mission.

This article attempts to shed some light on certain key aspects of offensive maneuver planning that our company teams should consider. The tactical suggestions presented are not meant to be approved solutions but simply approaches to increasing the company team's chances of success in offensive maneuver execution.

This analysis will focus on three major topics: The first, knowing the enemy, will cover IPB and reconnaissance. The second, transitioning from movement to maneuver, will include discussion of the approach march and

actions on contact. The final area will concern maneuvering in the enemy's battlespace, and this will explain the Red Zone, the application of combined arms, and fire and movement.

Knowing the Enemy

Therefore, I say: Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.³

To put it in contemporary terms, Sun Tzu, in his writings on war over 2,000 years ago, intended that commanders at all levels conduct what we call an intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB). This is the crucial second step in the mission analysis phase in the military decision-making process (MDMP). A negative trend observed at the NTC is that IPB at the company team level is either not done to the necessary level of

detail, or simply not done at all. Company team commanders usually do not template the enemy positions down to individual vehicle and dismounted fighting positions. Often ignored is the potentially lethal hand-held anti-tank threat. Moreover, company team commanders generally do not analyze the terrain for intervisibility lines, dead space, choke points, and trafficability. Perhaps more importantly, they often fail to consider the enemy's use of terrain with respect to specific weapon systems and obstacle emplacements. The result is that units haphazardly move into enemy engagement areas and suffer heavy losses.

The company team commander must conduct a thorough terrain and weather analysis by way of a map reconnaissance and, if possible, from dominating terrain overlooking the axis of advance before the start of the attack. In light of this analysis, the commander must then seek to understand the enemy situational template provided by the task force staff.⁴ Given this information and his own conclusions, the commander should attempt to visualize the enemy's dispositions, especially dismounted, and possible enemy courses of action. From this estimate, the commander will be able to develop a flexible scheme of maneuver that will ensure the company team secures the position of tactical advantage from which effective massed lethal fires and further maneuver against enemy weaknesses can occur.

Quite often though, the company team commander may not have adequate intelligence on the enemy, and thus will have difficulty visualizing how the enemy will fight. Therefore, the commander may need to gather, by way of reconnaissance, his own combat information — what our doctrine calls “those facts obtained on the battlefield.”⁵ However, reconnaissance can result in combat power losses and much time expended. Hence, the commander must balance the need for specific information against potential losses in the combat power that he will need during actions at his decisive point.⁶

A non-doctrinal technique that resembles the Russian use of “combat reconnaissance patrols,” or “forward patrols,” is the use of a combined arms patrol consisting of one tank, two BFVs, and a dismount infantry squad. This patrol will allow the company

team to gain early contact with the enemy using the minimum amount of force, thus, giving the commander time to analyze the situation and maneuver the mass of his force against the enemy with the greatest possible advantage.

Transitioning From Movement To Maneuver

With a clear vision of the terrain and enemy based on his IPB and the combat information provided by his combined arms patrol, the team commander can make sound decisions with respect to the type of movement formation to use during the approach march and which movement technique to use in conjunction with the movement formation. At the NTC, company teams consistently do not plan and rehearse the movement technique they will use with the movement formations, and often make contact while traveling or in column. Commanders have difficulty transitioning from less secure movement formations and techniques to more secure ones, like the wedge and bounding overwatch, respectively. The solution is that commanders must plan and rehearse these transitions, essential in a movement to contact, based on the likelihood of enemy contact.⁷

The transition from movement — when units bound forward supported by an overwatch element — to tactical maneuver, when an active base of fire covers forward progress, should occur before entering into the enemy's direct fire battle space. Quite often, observer/controllers (OCs) observe company teams moving, while in traveling overwatch, into the enemy's fire sack, where it is rapidly destroyed. Furthermore, once joined in battle, company teams fail to execute effective actions on contact. The typical reaction to enemy contact is a complete halt and an attempt to return fire at targets often beyond maximum effective ranges.

Instead, the company team should execute a well-rehearsed battle drill that establishes a base of fire, not an overwatch, by one element while the remaining elements seek covered and concealed positions. Unlike an overwatch, which suppresses when the enemy is visible, a base of fire actively suppresses an objective whether the enemy is visible or not.⁸ The net effect is that the enemy's “heads” are down, seeking cover, rather than engaging

friendly forces as they attempt to maneuver. Furthermore, it gives the commander time to develop and evaluate the situation, and decide on and execute a viable course of action. General George S. Patton addressed the same matter in his March 6, 1944, “Letters of Instruction”:

In battle, casualties vary directly with the time you are exposed to effective fire. Your own fire reduces the effectiveness and volume of the enemy's fire, while rapidity of attack shortens the time of exposure.⁹

Maneuvering in the Enemy's Direct Fire Battle Space

The last line in the above quote brings us to the next matter, effectively maneuvering in the “Red Zone” to bring about the enemy's destruction. The “Red Zone” is a non-doctrinal term referring to the enemy's direct fire battle space.

It is a dynamic, physical area that expands or contracts in relation to the ability of the enemy to acquire and engage with direct weapons fire. It is graphically characterized, in a BLUE-FOR deliberate attack, as the area between the probable line of contact and the limit of advance, within enemy direct fire range.¹⁰

As observed at the NTC, many company teams lose cohesion short of the objective and are unable to mass against a defending enemy or a counterattacking combined arms reserve. Maneuver has two components — fire and movement. Fire neutralizes, suppresses, demoralizes, and destroys enemy forces. Movement brings this fire-power into positions of advantage from which it extends and completes the destruction.¹¹ The solution to the above problem is the synchronization of fire and movement, which will enable company teams to effectively close with and destroy the enemy.

Fire from the rear is more deadly and three times more effective than fire from the front, but to get fire behind the enemy, you must hold him by frontal fire and move rapidly around his flank. Frontal attacks against prepared positions should be avoided if possible. “Catch the enemy by the nose with fire and kick him in the pants with fire emplaced through movement.”¹²

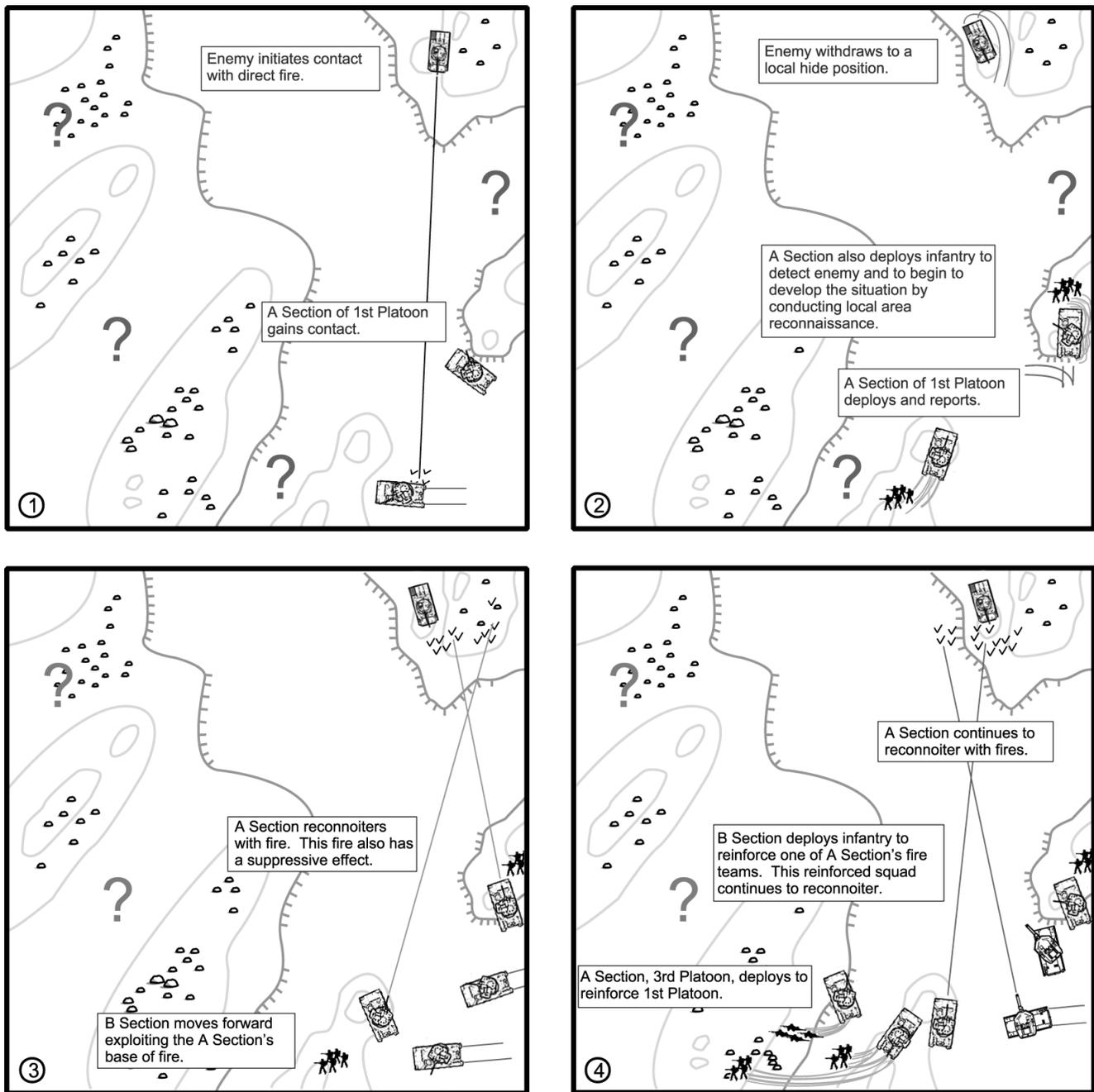


Figure 1: Company Team Maneuver through the Enemy's Battle Space!¹⁶

In order to avoid unnecessary losses, a commander must develop the situation and allow conditions for success to build before executing maneuver. He must possess combat patience, which allows him to control the pace of actions — tempo. It may take some time for the company team to regain the advantage after initial contact. This can be achieved by establishing suppressive fires and exploiting an enemy flank through the use of masking terrain. Moreover, it is critical to maintain all-around security throughout the fight in the Red Zone, especially to counter enemy anti-tank and dismounted threats.

To accomplish this maneuver of closing with and destroying the enemy, a tank and mechanized infantry company team commander has at his disposal a combined mix of assets. In a combined arms team, each type of system — tank, BIFV, and mechanized infantry — has an important role. The combined strengths of all these systems negate the weaknesses of individual systems.

The term combined arms refers to two or more arms in mutual support to produce complementary and reinforcing effects that neither can obtain separately.... Tactically, combined arms

*refers to coordinating units of different arms or capabilities.... Complementary combined arms should pose a dilemma for the enemy. As he evades the effects of one weapon or arm, he places himself in jeopardy of attack by another weapon.*¹³

A negative trend observed at the NTC is that company teams are not planning for the use of dismounted infantry in the attack. The result is that either the infantry become Red Zone casualties as their vehicles are destroyed, or they become possible fratricide casualties if they are dismounted, due to the unco-

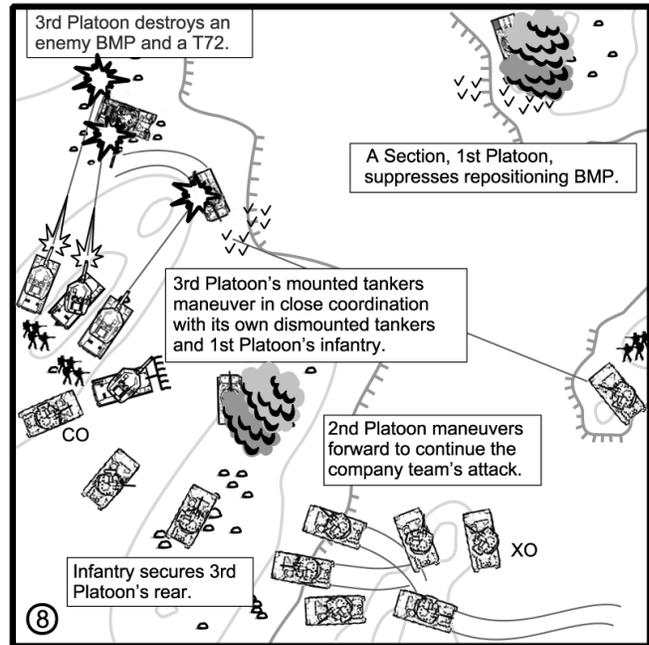
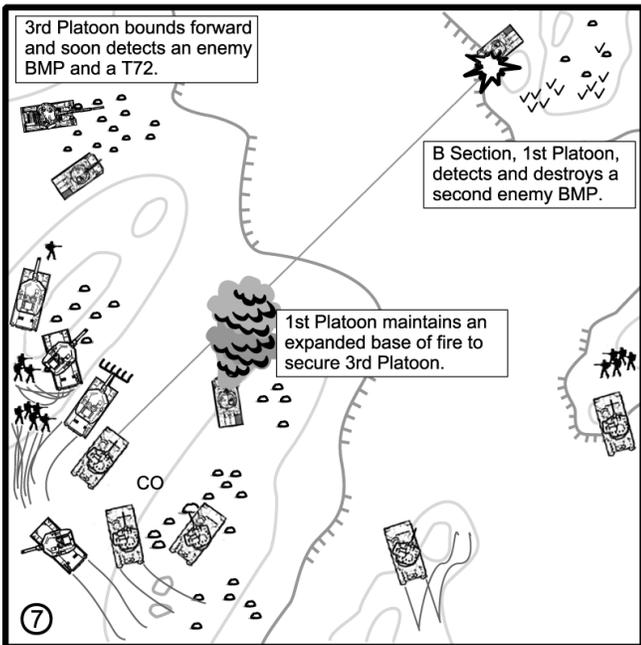
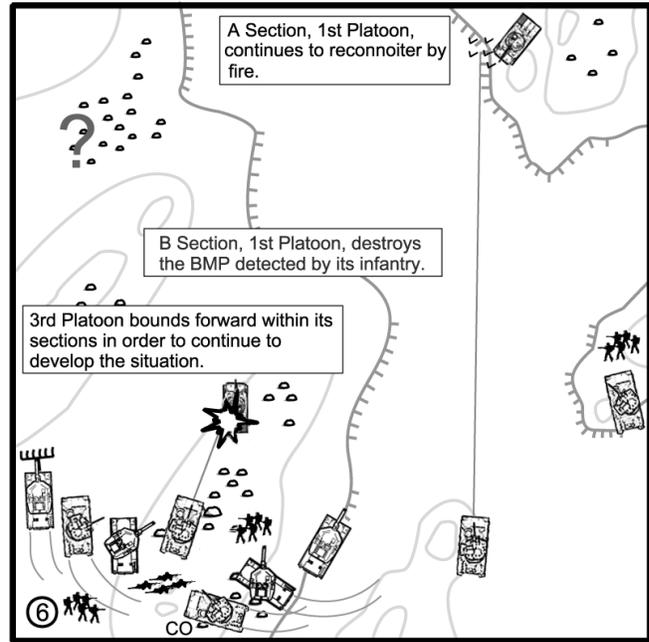
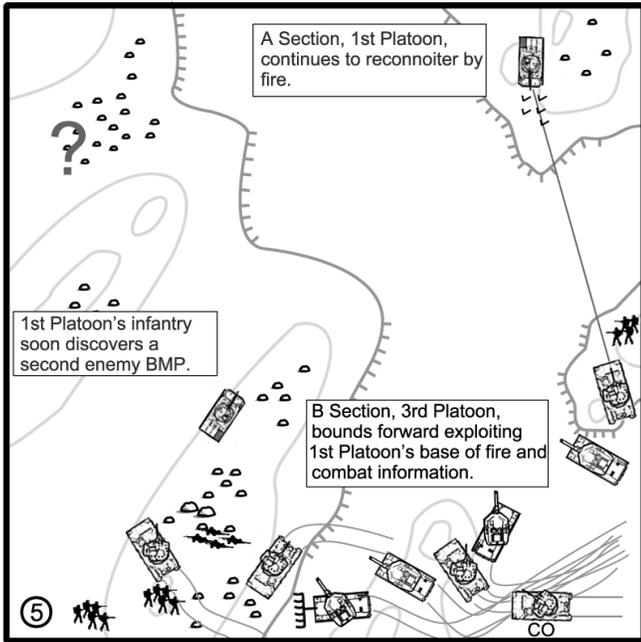


Figure 1a: Company Team Maneuver through the Enemy's Battle Space

ordinated nature of their employment. Based on a detailed terrain and enemy analysis, the company team commander must realize the value his dismounts have in ensuring mission accomplishment. The commander must fully integrate his dismounts in the scheme of maneuver.

There are many techniques for employing dismounted mechanized infantry. For instance, they are perfectly suited to operate in restrictive terrain, such as forests, rocky ground, and urban areas. They can clear passes and defiles for vehicles moving through

these dangerous areas. Infantry can also attack an assailable flank, forcing the enemy to commit in another direction. They are greatly beneficial in a reconnaissance role, getting eyes on the objective and guiding fighting vehicles to advantageous ground where they can bring effective fire to bear. An infantry squad can direct many sets of eyes in a 360-degree surveillance with a far better view of the situation than mounted soldiers who may be "buttoned up."

During the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, the Israelis learned the painful lesson of not having enough mechanized

infantry in their unit organizations. Many Israeli armored brigades suffered heavy losses due to Egyptian tank killer ambushes. They lacked infantry to provide close-in security against hard-to-detect enemy dismounts.¹⁴

*The tank is closed and to a large extent it is "blind." Its gun and coaxial machine guns can fire only in the direction that the turret is facing. On the other hand, the soldiers on the armored personnel carrier can make use of several pairs of eyes to scan the area in all directions, and they can quickly fire many weapons in a flexible manner.*¹⁵

The following is a possible offensive technique in the use of combined arms. The company team commander can direct a base of fire force consisting of — two BIFVs and two tanks. The BIFVs suppress enemy dismounts and vehicle positions while the tanks engage the enemy vehicles as they move into their firing positions. As the base of fire force suppresses the enemy causing him to seek cover, the dismounted infantry, acting as guides and scouts, move ahead of the flanking force that is seeking the enemy's rear. This technique sets the conditions for success by attacking the enemy from multiple directions. It also ensures that undetected enemy vehicles and infantry do not surprise the flanking force. For a graphical example of the effective execution of combined arms maneuver at the company team level see Figures 1 and 1a.

In short, successful closure with and destruction of the enemy hinges on the skillful use of the effects of combined arms and attacks from multiple directions.¹⁷

In some detail, we explored a few major reasons for the failure of the com-

pany team to effectively close with and destroy the enemy in the offense. Successfully maneuvering a combined arms team against a determined enemy is certainly part art and part science. With instinct and intuition, a commander must execute quick and sound tactical decisions based on his own capabilities and the little information he may have on the enemy and terrain. Such intuitive and instinctual capacity is developed by repeatedly placing the commander under difficult and realistic conditions — whether actual field exercises or computer simulations — and in as many different and stressful situations as possible to train his tactical decision-making faculties. Furthermore, the commander must expose his subordinates to the same intensive training to develop their ability to act quickly and decisively in any situation.

Home station is where this development must occur. Company team commanders must know our doctrine and understand that it is merely a foundation on which to build flexible tactical execution. By also possessing the ability to visualize the battlefield and act

accordingly, commanders can aggressively and effectively maneuver their units and close with and destroy the enemy with massed lethal fires, while at the same time securing and preserving their own combat power.

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Notes

¹Center for Army Lessons Learned, *A Collection of Trends, with Techniques and Procedures that Work*, NTC Trends Compendium No. 97-17 (Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command [TRADOC], September 1997) N24-40.

²*FM 100-5, Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 14 June 1993) 2-6.

³Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (London: Oxford University Press, 1963) 84.

⁴Center for Army Lessons Learned, *Closing with the Enemy: Company Team Maneuver*, Special Study (Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command [TRADOC], March 1998) 11.

⁵*FM 101-5-1, Operational Terms and Graphics* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 30 September 1997) 1-130; *FM 17-95, Cavalry Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 19 September 1991) 3-1.

⁶Special Study, 16.

⁷*Ibid.*, N30.

⁸*FM 71-1, Tank and Mechanized Infantry Company Team* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 22 Nov 1988) 2-34.

⁹George S. Patton, Jr., *War As I Knew It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947) 379.

¹⁰CTC Quarterly Bulletin No. 96-10, 17.

¹¹*FM 71-1*, 3-23.

¹²Patton, 380.

¹³*FM 100-40, Tactics*, Initial Draft (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, March 1995).

¹⁴RB 100-2, Vol. 1, "Selected Readings in Tactics, The 1973 Middle East War," (Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1980) 40.

¹⁵Avraham Adan, *On the Banks of the Suez* (Jerusalem, Israel: Edanim Publishers, 1979) 211.

¹⁶Special Study, 63-64.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 79.

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