

Some might argue that this is a mission order because you are given a mission-- attack Hill 450--but not told how to do it. That is incorrect. What happens if the enemy withdraws from Hill 450 before you attack? Do you still take the hill, or do you do something else? A mission order provides you with more guidance. Rather than being told exactly **what** to do, you are told what the commander **wants to accomplish** and what your contribution will be.

Remember: At a minimum, you must include the following when you issue a mission order to a subordinate leader:

- o Your intent.*
- o Your main effort.*
- o A mission for the subordinate leader that supports your intent and main effort.*

Generally, you should also include your senior's intent. Leaders at all levels need to know the intent of the commanders the next two levels up. Your platoon leaders need to know both your's and your battalion commander's intent. It is the only way they can continue to act in the absence of orders.

#### *Senior and Subordinate Responsibilities*

Using mission orders put specific responsibilities on both the senior and his subordinate. The senior is responsible to communicate his intent clearly. There must be no confusion on what he wants to do to the enemy. In the old method of issuing orders, the subordinate had to analyze the order he received and figure out what his **specified** missions were and what were his **implied** missions. He has no such responsibility in the mission order of maneuver warfare. When you issue a mission order, you must make it clear to your subordinates what you want them to do to the enemy.

A second responsibility of the senior is training his subordinate unit leaders as a team. The shift to mission orders is a big challenge to the Marine Corps. Units operating under mission orders will fail unless they are trained as cohesive teams whose commanders learn to **think** alike. The senior must train his subordinate commanders to think as he does. This is the only way that subordinates can act appropriately in the absence of direct control.

Third, the senior must learn to trust his subordinates. He must allow subordinates to make mistakes and learn from them. You cannot operate under mission orders and expect zero defects. By giving subordinates the latitude to act on their own initiative and seize opportunities, you maintain a high tempo and keep the enemy off balance. If subordinates are compelled to stop frequently and await orders, then the enemy will dictate the course of the battle.

The subordinate also has several responsibilities. First, he must use his initiative. Modern combat requires a high tempo of operations. Units at all levels must be active against the enemy. Squad and platoon leaders often face situations that are sketchy. Be aggressive! As a young troop leader in World War I, Lieutenant Erwin Rommel was the epitome of aggressiveness. Frequently, he faced vague situations where a decision was critical. Usually he decided to attack! Rommel forced the enemy to

react to him. If you can be fast, do something he doesn't expect, and knock him off balance, then you are likely to succeed.

The subordinate's second responsibility is to support the commander's intent. He must use initiative, but have the self discipline to keep it within the intent and also support the main effort. The commander's intent and main effort give direction to subordinates. They are the glue that keeps a unit from running willy-nilly over the battlefield.<sup>8</sup>

Third, if the subordinate uses initiative and changes his mission on his own, *he must make every effort to notify his senior of his action as rapidly as possible.* In the chaos of battle, friendly units will sometimes fire on each other accidentally. In a decentralized style of warfare, such accidents are minimized by units that are well-trained, cohesive teams. Although speed of action is important, subordinate leaders must not forget that their's is but one of many units fighting the enemy. *The subordinate must keep his senior informed of his actions!*

In summary, what are the characteristics of units that fight under mission orders? First, commanders tend to exercise control through a shared way of thinking (implicit communication) rather than through detailed orders and instructions (explicit communication). Orders are brief and give great latitude to subordinate initiative. However, the degree of initiative allowed subordinates is highly dependent upon their capabilities. Some subordinates act properly under minimum guidance and direction. Others are less capable of acting independently. As a leader, it's your responsibility to work with your subordinates to determine how much guidance each of them needs.

Secondly, combat is going to be fast and fluid. There will be no FEBA because forces will become intermixed as each side struggles to retain the initiative. For the side that operates best in high tempo combat, the fog of war becomes an ally because it disrupts the enemy more than it does you.

If you are to succeed in maneuver warfare, then your subordinates must act against the enemy in the best way possible without waiting to be told what to do.<sup>9</sup> Mission orders are the key to letting them do that while still guiding their individual actions toward a common goal.

#### IV. Main Effort

One tactical fundamental that is especially important to Marines is the concept of main effort. If Marines are to fight outnumbered and win, then they must use a main effort in their tactics.

Like the commander's intent, the main effort is a familiar phrase in Marine terminology. Both phrases were added to the operation order format of the 2d Marine Division in the early 1980s. Other FMF units picked up these concepts, and they are now beginning to appear in Marine Corps doctrinal publications.

You should recall from the last section that the commander's intent acts as a glue that keeps your efforts focused on what your superior wants to accomplish. It is a way to measure the long term success of your actions.

The main effort is a different type of glue. *It is the commander's bid to act decisively.* When he chooses a main effort, he says in effect, "This is the unit that will achieve a decisive result against the enemy." Most or all of the fire support goes to support the main effort. All other subordinate units are expected to act so as to support what the main effort is trying to do. In constituting the main effort, the commander may have to take risks elsewhere. If you are outnumbered, then you must take risks elsewhere. You must not try to cover all the bases; otherwise, you will be weak everywhere and strong nowhere.<sup>10</sup>

Commanders down to the company and sometimes to the platoon level will assign a main effort for all types of operations. It doesn't matter if you are attacking, defending, or on an approach march; you should have a main effort in all cases.<sup>11</sup> In the defense, your main effort might be your reserve, if you plan on destroying the attacking enemy with a timely, well-placed counterattack. In the offense, your main effort may well be the exploitation force.

However, your main effort must remain flexible. If the attack of the main effort bogs down while a supporting element finds unexpected success, then you will shift your main effort to the supporting element. You may also commit your reserves in the direction of the supporting element because you want to exploit success, not reinforce failure. The main effort must remain fluid at all times.

When you use a main effort, you use several of the principles of war. One of these is economy of force. If you are fighting outnumbered, then you must use economy of force. You will not have forces to cover every possibility. By concentrating your combat power in one decisive unit, you are going to get the most out of what you have available.

You also practice the principle of mass when you designate a main effort. In battle, you want to concentrate your combat power at the decisive time and place. Usually, that place is an enemy weakness, a gap. Your main effort is your Sunday punch; your effort to seek a decision. To fight any other way is to commit your forces piecemeal and without focus.

Finally, you keep your plan simple when you designate a main effort. Subordinate leaders should have no trouble understanding what you are trying to do. They know that they must act to support the main effort and use it as a mental reference point in their tactics. The leader of the main effort knows that it's his responsibility to achieve a decision. He knows he will enjoy your full support and that other units are working to contribute to his success. If he is aggressive, he will take substantial risks to accomplish your intent, knowing that he will be supported in every feasible way.

How do you choose a main effort? There is no recipe for determining where the main effort should go. While some tacticians have an intuitive ability to decide where to place their main effort, others must learn through experience. It takes practice to develop the skill and good judgment necessary to decide where to concentrate your forces.

Why is the concept of the main effort important at the company level? Because it helps you understand your commander's concept of operations and where you fit in. If you are assigned as the main effort, then you know that you can expect most, if not

all, of the available fire support. You know that you are expected to aggressively seek out opportunities and to exploit enemy weaknesses. You also know that you can take risks because you are the focus of the effort and other units are working to support you.

If you are not the main effort, then you must always act to support it. When making tactical decisions, you use the main effort as a reference point. You should always ask, "Are my actions in support of the main effort and the commander's intent?" Sometimes, you will suddenly spot an opportunity that, if seized, will accomplish the commander's intent. Seizing that opportunity might demand a course of action that violates your mission and is not in consonance with the commander's concept of the operation. What should you do?

You should exploit the opportunity. In some cases as a supporting element, you will find success while the main effort fails. In that case, you may assume that the main effort has shifted to your attack, and you are now the unit seeking a decision.

There are no concrete rules to obey--only the fundamentals and your good sense to guide you. Each situation is unique, and the right course of action is seldom completely certain. As a leader, your job is to get yourself as best prepared as you can so that you will make the right decision when the time comes.

## V. Soft Spot Tactics

Soft spot tactics are what most Marines equate with maneuver warfare. They are the tactics of pitting strength against weakness. You want to attack the enemy with the bulk of your forces where he is weakest. They are also called the tactics of surfaces and gaps. An enemy strength is a surface; where he is vulnerable is called a gap.<sup>12</sup>

Third generation tactics (Chapter Two) are soft spot tactics. The Germans enjoyed great success with them toward the end of World War I. One word of caution, however: The German infiltration tactics were appropriate to the western front in 1917 and 1918. There, the front was static and linear. These tactics are a good place to start but you must look beyond World War I to develop tactics appropriate for the modern era. In modern warfare, the front is likely to be non-linear and fluid. You must not try to adopt the German method and apply it directly to modern warfare. Rather, you should understand the concept of surfaces and gaps, and apply it to each unique situation.

### *Surfaces and Gaps*

A gap may be a weak or undefended point in an enemy's line. If so, we want to attack through gaps and roll the enemy up from the rear. Sometimes, however, what appears to be a gap is really a surface. The Soviet fire sack defense is one such case. Look at figure 3-2. If successful, the Soviet defense draws an attacker into a fire sack where it is vulnerable to fire from three surrounding strongpoints. The fire sack is a surface. What would be a gap in this case? It might be one of the strongpoints. If you can reduce one of the strongpoints by an infiltration attack, then you have weakened the enemy and made him vulnerable. A better solution might be to go around one of the strongpoints. There are no concrete rules to go by; each case

is situational. In deciding where to attack, you will rely on your knowledge, training, and estimate of the situation.<sup>13</sup>

You must understand that a gap is a relative concept. What is considered a gap by the infantry might not be considered a gap by an aircraft. For example, an air defense battery is usually a gap for an attacking infantry unit. It is vulnerable to ground attack, particularly if it is not protected by its own infantry. But the battery is a surface to an aircraft. The aircraft is vulnerable to its guns or missiles. If the battery were on the move, however, then the aircraft probably wouldn't be vulnerable to its weapons. Again, each case is based on the situation at hand.

Another gap might be an enemy flank. One definition of a flank is "That aspect towards which a force is not devoting its primary attention."<sup>14</sup> The concept of a flank is also relative. Let's say that you are attacking an enemy who has his forces deployed frontally against you. If you create a diversion and draw his attention elsewhere, then he may shift his forces to deal with the diversionary attack. His front then becomes a flank, and you are attacking a gap in his forces.

You might now ask, "Why attack through gaps; what am I trying to accomplish?" The answer is threefold: First, you want to get into the enemy's rear. Remember that the goal in maneuver warfare is to destroy the enemy by disrupting his cohesion. If you can capture his command post, overrun his artillery, or cut his lines of communication, then you may force his entire unit to surrender without ever fighting his combat forces.

Next, you stay alive when you use soft spot tactics. By avoiding surfaces and attacking through gaps, you avoid throwing your bodies against his bullets. If you attack his surfaces, then you are probably wasting your men's lives. In modern war, frontal assaults are terribly costly in casualties.

Third, attacking through gaps keeps the tempo high. It is a way to keep the enemy guessing and off balance. Attacking surfaces slows you down. It causes attrition of your forces against targets that often don't mean much. Attacking through gaps is one key to keeping the tempo of operations high.

#### *Locating and Creating Gaps*

You can locate gaps through a technique called *reconnaissance pull* (recon pull). This is a technique where the main effort or exploitation force is led in the direction of a gap by a smaller force whose mission is to find gaps. Don't confuse recon pull with the missions of Force Recon and Recon Battalion which are units whose missions are **specialized** reconnaissance. They usually don't perform recon pull. Recon pull is usually provided by a reconnaissance screen which is created from an attacking unit's own forces. For example, a rifle company might use a rifle platoon deployed on a broad front as its reconnaissance screen. Each squad in the platoon searches for gaps in the enemy. When it finds one, it guides other forces around and through it, and the attack is pulled in the direction of the gap. Recon pull demands initiative at every level up the chain of command.<sup>15</sup>

Sometimes, you may have to create gaps. One procedure for this is a three step assault. First, you must **suppress** the enemy in the area where you want to create the gap. Pin the enemy down; keep his head down and suppress his fire and the movement of reinforcements. Next, **assault** the position where you intend on creating the gap. A

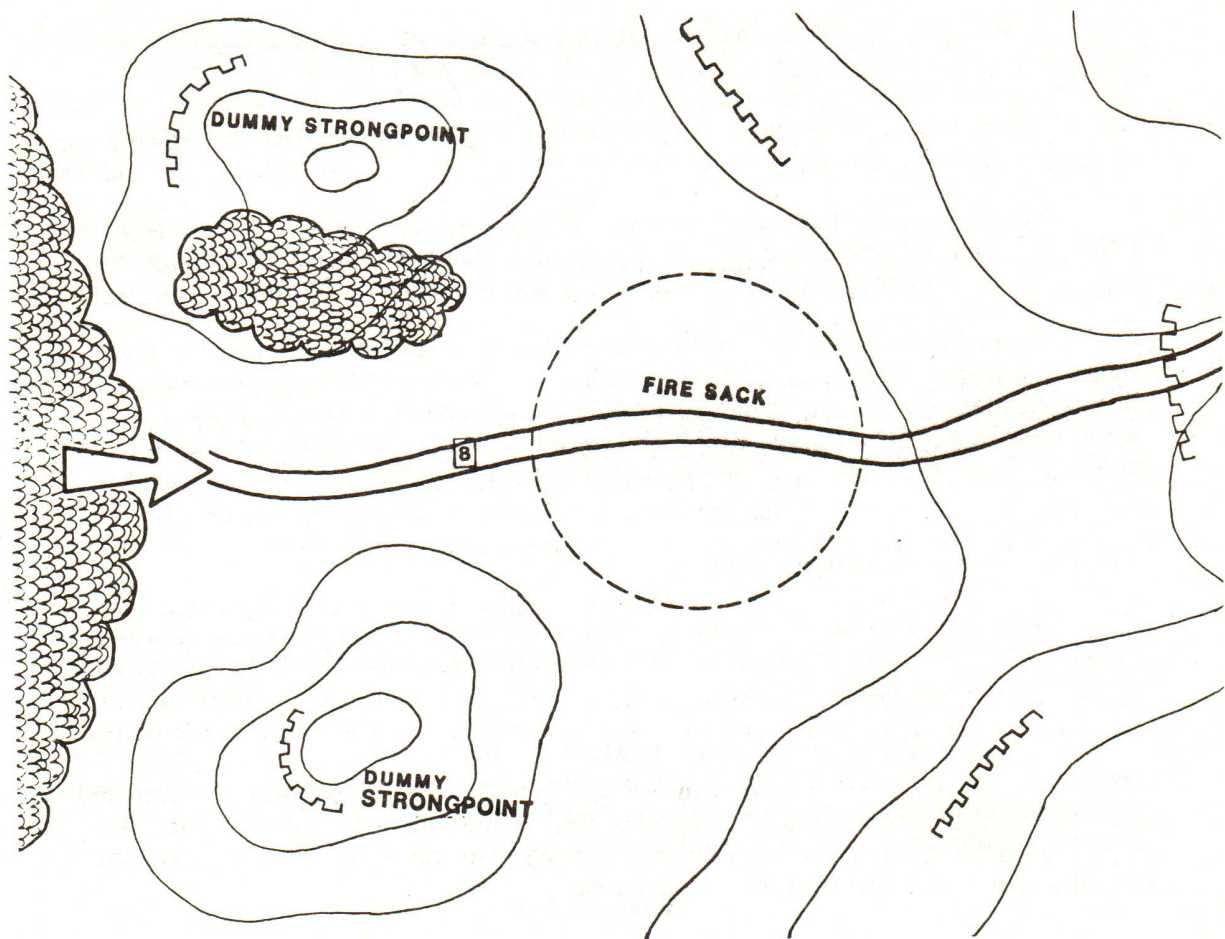


Fig 3-2. Fire sack defense.

relatively small size assault force that attacks on a narrow front can do this. Then, you **exploit** the breach with the exploitation force. The exploitation force widens the breach and penetrates and rolls up the enemy from the rear, while part of it continues the advance. It is usually the largest of the three elements.<sup>16</sup>

You may also create a gap through deception. As mentioned earlier, if you can deceive the enemy about your intentions, then he may make a mistake and present you with an opportunity. One way to deceive him is by a feint, which might cause him to shift his forces or commit his reserves in the wrong place.

Surfaces are usually bypassed. You want to keep up the momentum of the attack and have follow on forces deal with strongpoints. If you get around or behind an enemy strongpoint, then you may weaken it by cutting its lines of communication. To maneuver around a strongpoint, you want to suppress it by fire or by a holding or pinning attack.<sup>17</sup>