

Occasionally, you may have to attack a strongpoint. This is probably best done through an infiltration attack. In this type of attack, you infiltrate the enemy's defense with small groups of men. Then, you either attack him from his rear or force him to attack you. The Chinese enjoyed great success using infiltration attacks against United Nations forces in the Korean War.

Conversely, the least desirable way to handle strongpoints is to assault them frontally. You will use up many men and much material assaulting frontally against enemy forces in prepared positions. You will also probably be defeated.

From this discussion on surfaces and gaps, you can see some missions that a rifle squad or platoon might be tasked with. It may be tasked with probing an enemy position in order to locate gaps (recon pull). It might be the assault, suppression, or exploitation element in an assault. It also may be tasked with conducting a feint attack to deceive the enemy as to the higher unit's main effort.

VI. Objectives and Aiming Points

When the Marine Corps adopted maneuver warfare as doctrine in 1987, the concept of the objective changed significantly. To fully understand this change, let's first look at the objective in its old context.

The term **objective** is familiar to Marines. In its former context, phrases like *enroute to the objective* or *seize the objective* were used frequently. Objectives were usually pieces of terrain that subordinates had to seize or control. The following example highlights the use of objective in this context:

Example 3-1

Look at figure 3-3. Assume that an amphibious task force (ATF) has the mission of establishing a beachhead in the vicinity of Sante Fe in order to secure a landing point for conducting follow-on operations. In his planning sequence, the commander amphibious task force (CATF) identifies two objectives whose control will enable him to accomplish his mission. He labels these objectives: ATF Objective 1 and ATF Objective 2 and assigns the commander of the landing force (CLF) the mission of seizing and controlling them.

Assume that the landing force in this example is a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). The MEU commander studies the ATF mission and his mission. He identifies two more objectives that he considers critical to accomplishing the ATF mission. He labels each of these: Landing Force Objective A and Landing Force Objective B, and assigns them as missions to his battalion landing team (BLT). (See figure 3-4.)

The BLT now develops an operation plan (OPLAN) whose scheme of maneuver accomplishes the BLT's assigned tasks. For this example, one scheme of maneuver might be:

One company lands across red beach at H-hour on D-day, and seizes LF Objective A. On order, it continues the attack and seizes ATF Objective 1. Simultaneously, one company conducts a vertical assault at H-hour to attack

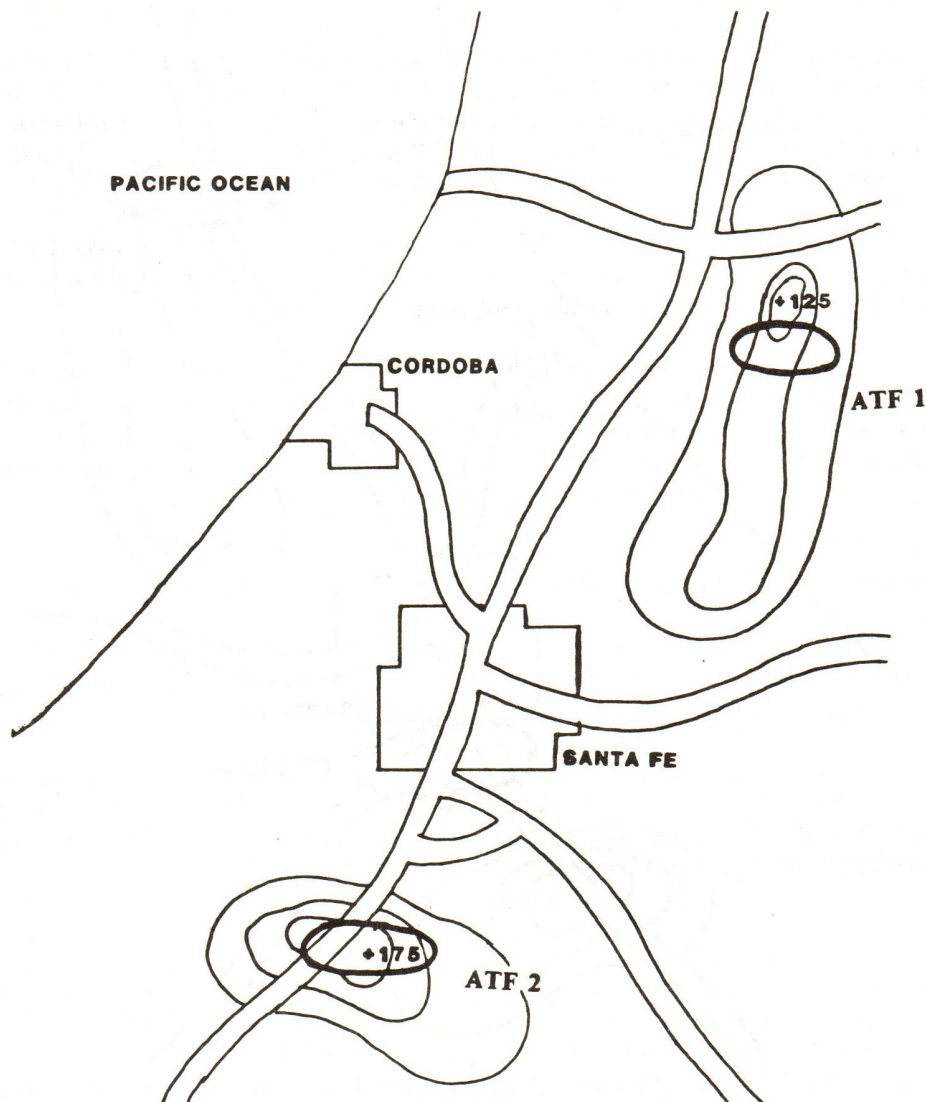


Fig 3-3.

and seize LF Objective B. One company is initially in reserve, and, on order, conducts a vertical assault to seize ATF Objective 2. (See Fig 3-5.)

With this scheme of maneuver, the BLT accomplishes all its assigned tasks. It plans on seizing four objectives that allow the ATF to accomplish its mission of establishing a beachhead. Note how each of the four objectives in this example were oriented on key terrain. Seizing and occupying each objective became missions of subordinate units in the BLT OPLAN.

Remember that the goal in maneuver warfare is to destroy the enemy by shattering his cohesiveness. The focus is on the enemy; what he is doing and what vulnerabilities he has exposed. If you are required to seize and occupy terrain features and only terrain features as your objectives, then you must focus on terrain rather than the enemy. Let's go back to the example one in figures 3-3 to 3-5. Suppose that, in the

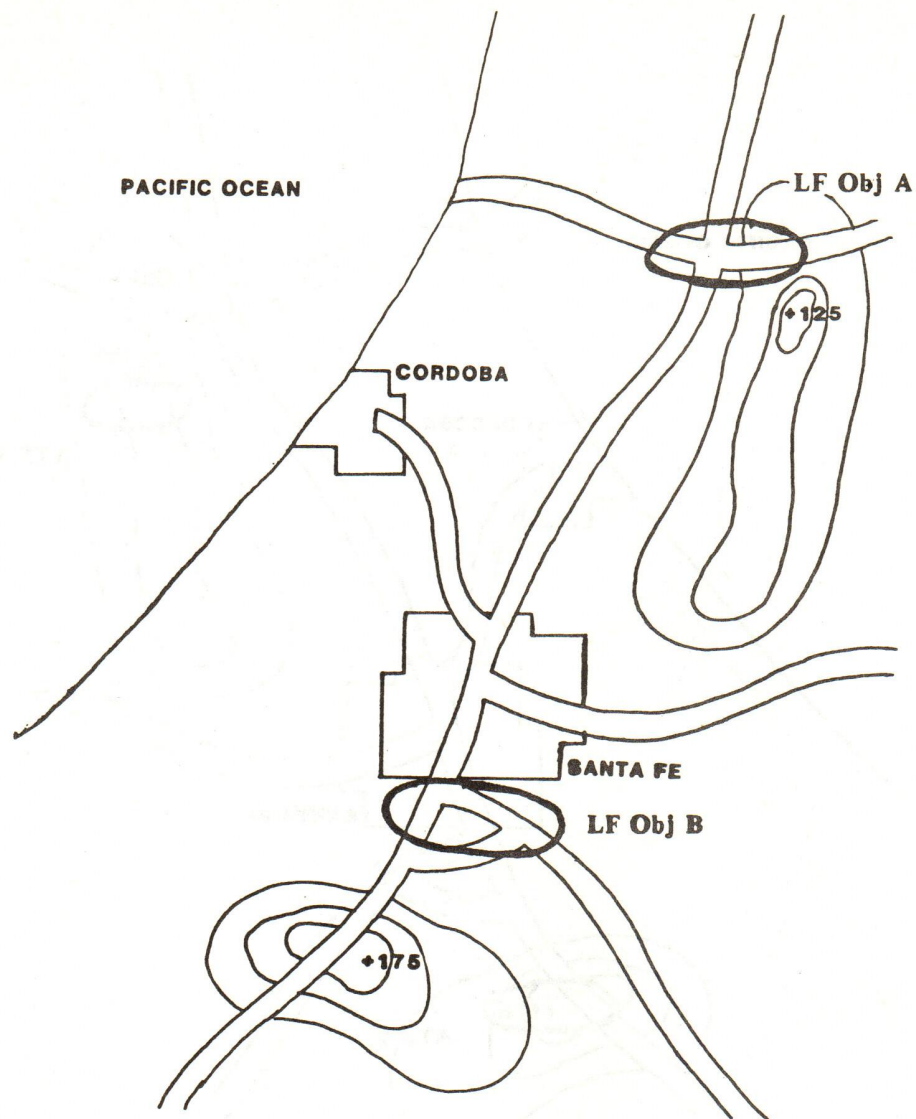


Fig 3-4.

course of the operation, LF Objective B became unimportant to accomplishing the mission. Would the BLT commander still be required to seize it since the landing force commander assigned it? In maneuver warfare, he would not. Any objective is too restrictive if you consider it solely in terms of terrain.

In maneuver warfare, the objective takes on a different meaning. The objective is the goal for which a force is constituted. Often, this goal is the ultimate military objective--defeat the enemy. Subordinate objectives are chosen so as to contribute to the ultimate or overall objective. Subordinate objectives may be physical--suppressing or delaying an enemy unit. They may also be mental--inducing chaos in his rear areas, or directed towards his morale. Note that in this context, the objective is oriented on the enemy, not terrain.¹⁸

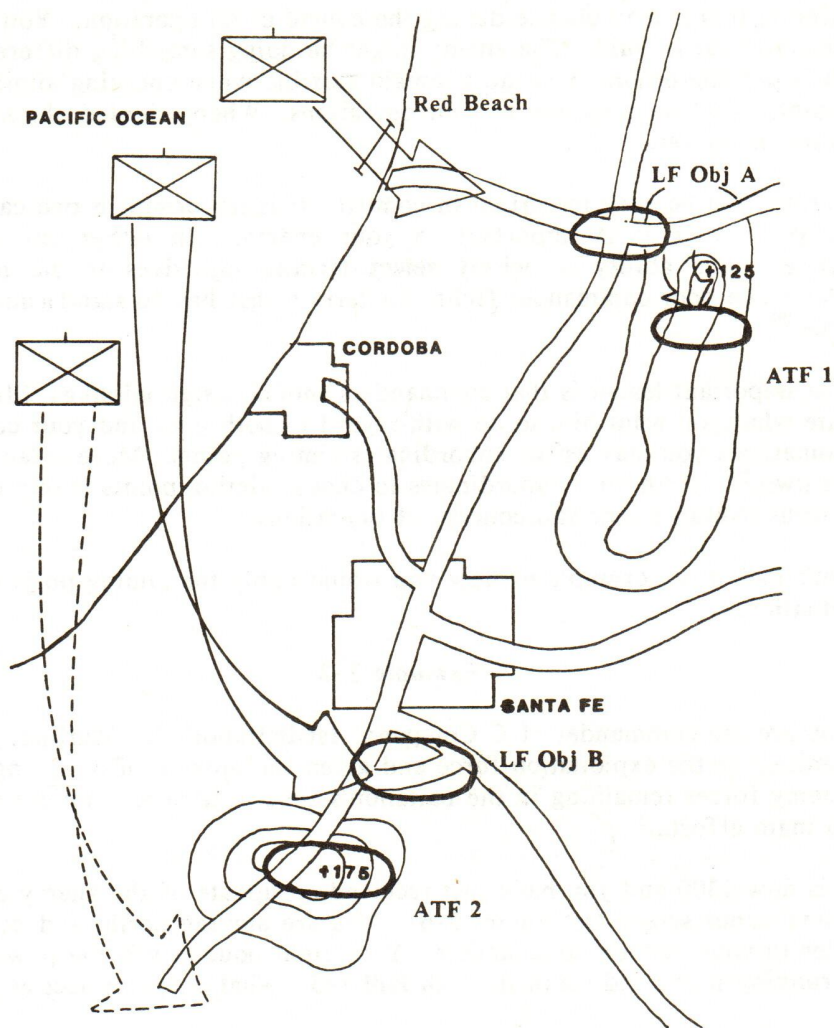


Fig 3-5.

In the former context, objectives were assigned as missions, for example, *Attack and seize Hill 325*. Such missions are usually too restrictive when you consider them in the context of the mission orders described in section three. A commander should assign missions in terms of what he wants done to the enemy, rather than consider objectives as missions.¹⁹ For example, a mission assigned to a rifle platoon should be: "Attack the enemy in his left flank reference Hill 325," rather than "Attack and seize Hill 325." The difference is subtle, but important. In the former case, the platoon is given a mission--attack the enemy's left flank. The platoon's objective is the enemy left flank. Attacking this flank contributes to the company's objective: delaying or fixing the enemy, while another unit maneuvers against him. The platoon is also assigned an aiming point--Hill 325. Aiming points are sometimes oriented on terrain but not always. Often, you will use an enemy unit or locality as an aiming point. In the latter case, the platoon's mission is unclear--Is it to attack the enemy, or to seize Hill 325 regardless of what is there?

Aiming points may change during the course of an operation. You should expect this because combat is fluid. The enemy might be doing something differently now than when you issued the order. You must remain flexible when choosing aiming points. Aiming points also give direction to your operations. When oriented on terrain, they act as control measures.

Terrain can be very important in combat. It is important in two cases: if it is useful to you, or if it is important to your enemy. In either case, *terrain becomes the objective*. The ability to wisely select terrain objectives is the mark of a good commander. The poor commander fights for terrain that has no significant value to either force.²⁰

The important lesson is that commanders should assign **missions**. Missions tell a subordinate what you want him to do with regard to both your and your commander's intent. Sometimes you may assign subordinates aiming points. More often, he will choose his own.²¹ Train your subordinates to choose aiming points wisely and with regard to your overall intent and concept of operations.

Let's look at an example of how you would apply the aiming point concept in a tactical situation:

Example 3-2

You are the commander of C Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines. This morning, you were committed as the exploitation force and given the mission of attacking north to destroy enemy forces remaining in the battalion's zone of action. You are the battalion's main effort.

It is now 1300 and you have just received an update of the enemy disposition from your reconnaissance screen (see figure 3-6). You are moving north, and decide to give a frag order to your platoon commanders. Your right boundary is the power line inclusive running north and south through Hill 145. What do you select as your aiming point?

There are several correct answers. You may want to choose Hill 180 as an aiming point. It dominates the fording site and both bridges, which allows you to trap some of the enemy's forces south of the river. You may want to select the mortar position as your aiming point. By destroying his fire support, you take away something that is dear to him. The boldest, and maybe best choice, is the enemy headquarters south of the forest. By capturing his headquarters, you disrupt and disorganize him, which destroys his cohesion. You can then attack and defeat his other forces more easily than if you attack them frontally, since they are now isolated and fighting piecemeal.

If you choose either Hill 210 or the enemy force in the woods near South Bridge, then you are attacking enemy strength, something he wants you to do. Instead, you want to get around or through his front line forces and attack decisively in his rear. Probably your best scheme of maneuver is to place a pinning attack on the enemy force on Hill 210, and send your main effort around east of Hill 210 and toward the CP. Give the commander of your main effort the latitude to choose how he wants to attack and what aiming points he will use to get to the CP. However, you must always keep your plan flexible. The situation may change at any time and you must remain prepared to adjust as the situation dictates.

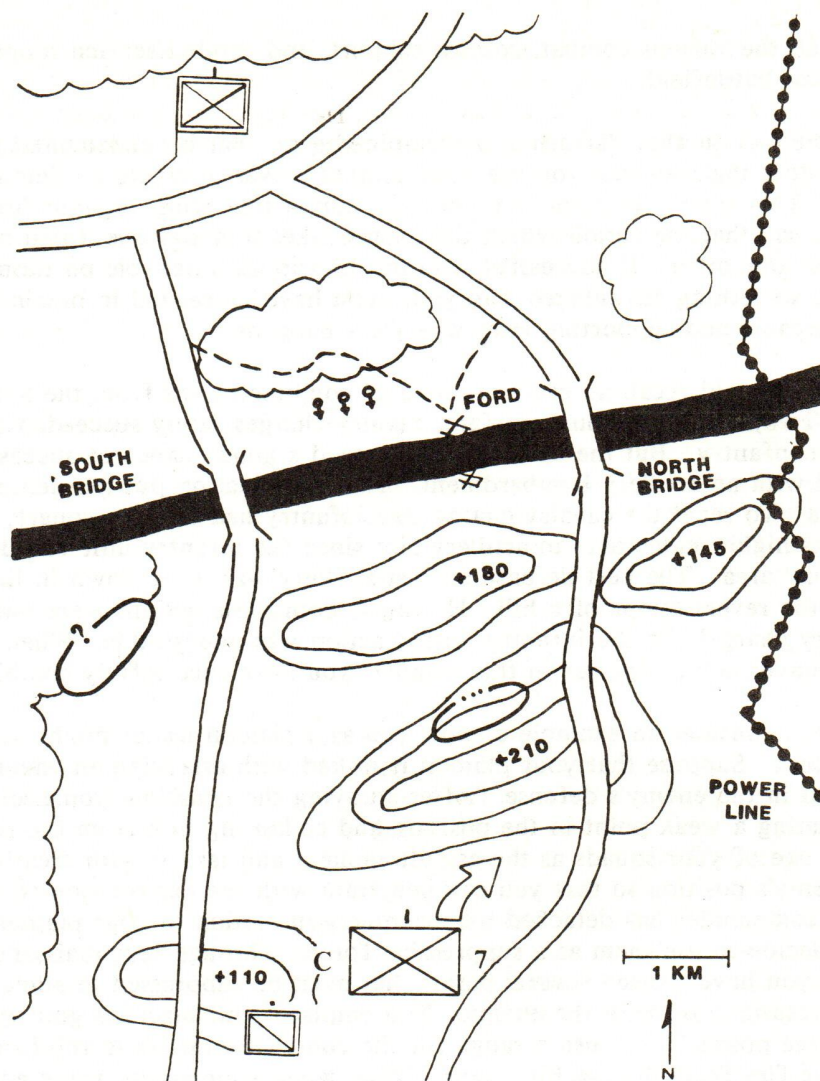


Fig 3-6.

VII. Concept of Combined Arms

The Marine Corps is the only truly unified air-ground team in the world. It has fought successfully on countless battlefields, often against foes that outnumbered Marines by as much as 8 to 1. In the Chosin Reservoir Campaign in December 1950, the 1st Marine Division-1st Marine Air Wing team annihilated some 8 Communist Chinese divisions in one of that war's more memorable battles. Marines are justly proud of their long history of battlefield success, often in the face of great adversity.

The Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) is often called a combined arms team. Combined arms means that the MAGTF has every element necessary for war. It has maneuver forces (tanks and infantry), combat support (artillery, air, engineer, and reconnaissance), and combat service support. When naval gunfire is included, the MAGTF has a tremendous amount of firepower. Combined arms in this context means that you

combine all the various combat, combat support, and combat service support necessary to fight on the battlefield.

There is another definition of combined arms that is fundamental to maneuver warfare. It is the idea that you use your combat power to create a dilemma for the enemy.²² This means that you combine your supporting arms, organic fires, and maneuver in such a way that the action which the enemy takes to avoid one threat makes him more vulnerable to another. If successful, you put him in an untenable position and force him to do something advantageous to you. You have succeeded in maximizing the effect of your organic and supporting fires when this happens.

You should recall an early example of combined arms from the Smooth Bore Era (Chapter Two). In Napoleonic warfare, cavalry charges rarely succeeded against competent infantry. But the cavalry charge stood a good chance of success if it was combined with an artillery bombardment. This combination put the defending infantry in a dilemma. To repel the cavalry charge, the infantry had to form square. However, the square was highly vulnerable to artillery fire since the infantry unit was deployed in such a small area. The best defense against artillery was to lie down in line or take cover on the reverse slope of a hill. However, both these actions were vulnerable to the cavalry charge! To the infantry, either action was undesirable. When you combine your maneuver and firepower in this manner, you have successfully combined arms.

Let's consider an example of how you as a platoon leader might use the combined arms concept. Suppose that your platoon is tasked with attacking an enemy position to open a gap in the enemy's defense. After studying the situation, you decide to attack by penetrating a weak point in the position and collapsing him from the rear. You designate one of your squads as the assault element and task it with creating a breach in the enemy's position so that you can penetrate with the exploitation force. Your company commander has detached his machine gun section to your platoon for your attack, and you decide to use them as a suppression force. Through reconnaissance of the enemy positions, you have located several points that must be suppressed to allow your assault forces to close with the enemy. You emplace your machine gun squads to provide fire on these points. You also arrange for the company mortars to reinforce the suppressive fire from the machine guns. Now, when your assault force advances, you have created a dilemma for the enemy. If he engages your assault force, he is vulnerable to your suppressive fire. If he takes cover to avoid the mortars and machine guns, then he allows the assault force to maneuver in close where it becomes effective. By your skillful use of fire and maneuver, you not only give him problems physically, but mentally as well. As General Vandegrift once said, "Positions are seldom lost because they have been destroyed, but almost invariably because the leader has decided in his own mind that the position cannot be held." The effective use of combined arms hastens that decision.

There are essentially two physical elements in a force's combat power: maneuver and firepower. Maneuver is movement that gives you an advantage relative to the enemy. It is more than just movement. You can move your forces all over the battlefield, but if you gain nothing in terms of positional advantage, then you have not maneuvered on the enemy. Similarly, you do not have to move to maneuver against an enemy. If he moves into a position that gives you an advantage, then you have, by default, successfully maneuvered against him. Maneuver is usually the decisive element of combat power.