



The AirLand Battle

A Winning Combination

The AirLand Battle doctrine calls for “deep attack.” In this short treatise, the author suggests a change in targeting priorities and a reorganization of the combined arms team in order to direct our strength at the enemy’s weakness and create vulnerability we can exploit.



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The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of any Department of Defense agency.

THE AirLand concept is not a futuristic dream to remain on the shelf until all new systems are fielded...corps and divisions can and must begin to learn and practice fighting the AirLand Battle now...." These words from TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5 provide the impetus for gaining a clear understanding of what the AirLand Battle is and provide a challenge for some critical thoughts as to how we might best apply the concepts associated with it.¹

Current doctrine embodied in the AirLand Battle is oriented toward gaining and maintaining the initiative through offensive action and "deep attack." The concept of being outnumbered and fighting to win appears, at first glance, extremely difficult if not impossible. We are told we must defeat the first echelon forces and throw the enemy's offensive machine off balance by striking deep into the second echelon. The overwhelming enemy mass must be defeated through timely application of effective fire. Unfortunately, the size of their mass quickly leads us to the conclusion that only high-value fire (nuclear fire) would be effective. We are dominated by the statistics, and any hope of striking a favorable balance at the conventional level seems unlikely at best.²

There is, however, a possibility that a change of target priorities and the tactical employment of our combined arms team could offer a combination more likely to succeed

at the conventional level as well as in the nuclear/chemical environment of the integrated battlefield.³ What I am suggesting is a reevaluation of the attrition strategy that pits strength against strength and matches tank for tank. Rather, let us exploit the strengths of our weapon systems by taking advantage of our enemy's vulnerabilities. Let's use our assets to attack the more vulnerable elements of their combined arms team to create an imbalance for them which we can exploit through offensive action.

The combined arms team is essentially a mix of fire and maneuver forces with various weapon systems providing the preponderance of either the fire or maneuver characteristics of combat power. Generally, tank-heavy armored formations dominate the maneuver forces on the modern battlefield. Threat doctrine is firmly grounded in the dominant role these forces play in offensive operations designed for deep penetration and overwhelming mass. Heavy fire is provided by the large number of artillery tubes and multiple rocket launchers (MRLs) located well forward to support the deep thrust. Aerial systems project fire deep into the main battle area and beyond.

Current U.S. doctrine tends to match our armor against theirs and our artillery fire against theirs in counterbattery fire. Complex combat effectiveness models have shown that slugging matches such as this lead to outcomes favoring

¹ TRADOC Pam 525-5, "The AirLand Battle and Corps 86," Department of the Army, Headquarters, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Ft. Monroe, VA, 25 March 1981, p.4.

² The current proliferation of quantitative models and the American penchant for them has, in my opinion, established a dangerous trend. An overreliance on quantitative models, especially in force planning and policy making, may set us up for a "paper defeat" which could lead to a moral defeat. The determination implicit in F.W. Lanchester's work remains with us today. See F.W. Lanchester, *Aircraft in Warfare: The Dawn of the Fourth Arm* (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1916), p. 38.

³ For a comprehensive presentation of the integrated battlefield, see Reference Book 100-34, "Operations on the Integrated Battlefield, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College," Ft. Leavenworth, KS, March 1981.

quantitative superiority.⁴ However, more favorable outcomes may result from a different combination of forces.

Threat artillery located well forward may be the key vulnerability to exploit in the initial phase of the battle. If the effective fire of these weapons can be denied the attacking forces early-on, we may unbalance their combined arms team which will create additional vulnerabilities to exploit. The question is, of course, how to most ef-

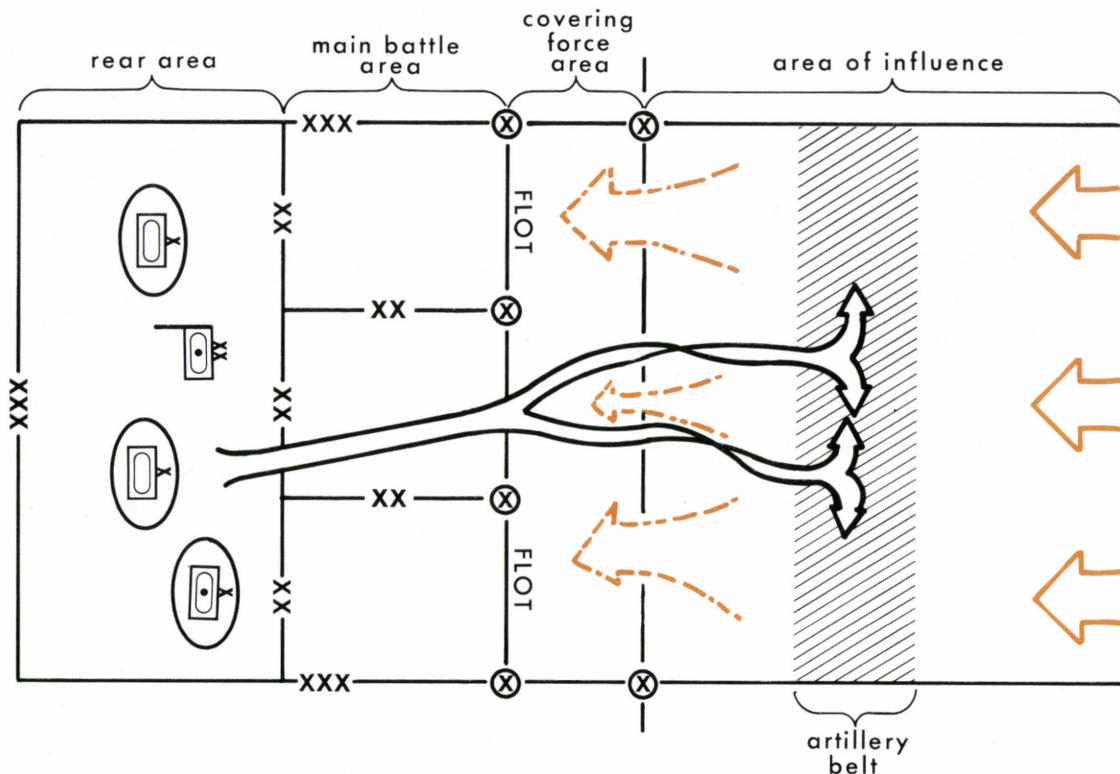
fectively accomplish this task. As already mentioned, counterbattery fire requires forward positioning of our artillery which increases its vulnerability and leads to costly exchanges. At some later date, our MRLs may add their weight to this crucial task.

What I suggest here is that aerial platforms, both Air Force and Army, have enemy artillery as their first priority for attack. The combination of a high-low mix of aircraft operating as a high speed

penetration into the enemy "artillery belt" may well be the key to silencing their guns. Flight corridors for the attack should be selected to avoid the intense air defense artillery (ADA) of the enemy's main battle formations. High speed, low level approaches over wooded or untrafficable terrain supported by suppressive fires would enhance success of the penetration. Flechette and high explosive 2.75 inch rockets would be effective against the relatively exposed targets in the artillery belt. TOWs (tube-launched, optically-tracked, wire-guided missiles) could destroy high value point type targets. Weapon signatures would facilitate locating firing batteries. Air Force systems could engage enemy air and provide ADA suppression while attack

⁴ For examples of various computer models, see Reiner K. Huber, Lynn F. Jones and Egil Reine ed. *Military Strategy and Tactics: Computer Modeling of Land War Problems* (New York: Plenum Press, 1974). For an excellent example of a quantitative model, read T.N. Dupuy, "Application of the Quantified Judgment Method of Analysis of Historical Combat to Current Force Assessments," in *Military Strategy and Tactics*, pp. 133-151. A critical analysis of the current modeling techniques is provided by J. A. Stockfish, *Models, Data and War: A Critique of the Study of Conventional Forces*. The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, CA. March 1975. "Indeed, on the subject of force structure, the new firepower indexes, and models that use them, should be silent because they have nothing to offer," p. 78.

FIGURE 1: High-low aerial attack teams bypass heavy formations to strike artillery belt.



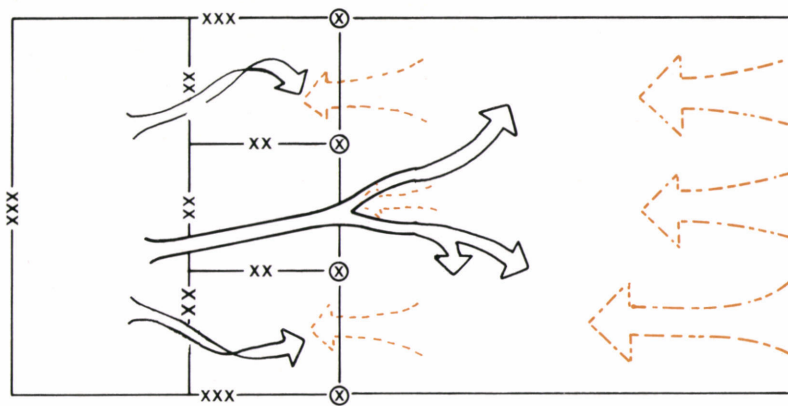


FIGURE 2: Armor heavy reserve conducting deep attack through first echelon gaps strikes follow-on units and prepares to meet second echelon as aerial attack teams strike disorganized enemy in the main battle area.

helicopters strike artillery and support units. Recovery elements consisting of security and maintenance teams would accompany the aerial deep attack forces.

The symbiotic relationship of the high-low mix should enhance the effectiveness of the team and allow it to seriously disrupt, if not totally deny, effective fire support for the attacking threat forces. This combination would allow for the preponderance of friendly artillery to be positioned well back, out of range of most threat fires. The majority of friendly artillery would be firing at max range out to 5 km

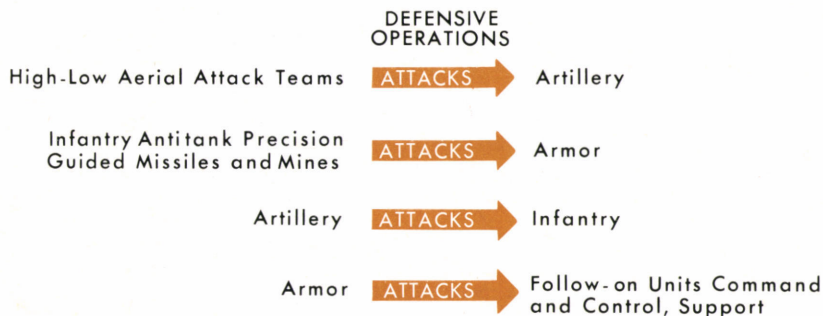
beyond the forward line of own troops. The weight of their fires would be concentrated in support of action in the main battle area. Primary weapons systems for the destruction of enemy armor in the main battle area would be precision guided munitions/missiles (PGMs) and mines. Deep penetration by some enemy armor, though considerably disorganized, must be expected. Destruction of these machines by infantry units armed with PGMs will be facilitated by the decreased volume of enemy artillery fire and availability of responsive fire support.

Armor heavy reserves will then be capable of effective counterattack and deep thrust through gaps in the enemy first echelon forces.⁵ Follow-on support and command and control organizations will be the targets for these attacking units. Paralysis and destruction of the enemy offensive machine will be their objective. The high-low aerial attack teams could then shift their priority from the artillery belt to the disorganized enemy forces in the main battle area.

This combination of striking the enemy artillery belt by a high-low mix of aerial attack teams, reduced vulnerability of friendly artillery, destruction/disorganization of threat armor by infantry PGMs and mines, and armor heavy reserves prepared to exploit opportunities for deep thrust at vulnerable follow-up units offers the possibility of directing strength at weakness and providing a winning combination in the AirLand Battle.

⁵ For an interesting discussion of this concept, see *Generals Balck and Von Mellenstein on Tactics: Implications for NATO Military Doctrine*, BDM/W-81-077-TR, The BDM Corporation, McLean, VA, 19 December 1980.

FIGURE 3: AirLand Battle priority for attack.



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Additional articles include, "Read For Personal Growth, Professional Development" in *ARMY*, August 1981, pp 60-61, and "Consider the Balloon" in *Aviation Digest*, December 1981, pp 31-33.