Maneuver Warfare in the Light Infantry
The Rommel Model

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> Given the same amount of intelligence, timidity will do a thousand times more damage in war than audacity.
>
> Clausewitz, *On War*

ERWIN ROMMEL'S IMPACT ON THE GERMAN WAY OF WAR

While most everyone knows that the World War II Panzer leader, Erwin Rommel, was a daring practitioner of maneuver warfare, too few know that he learned and perfected his maneuver warfare skills as a light infantryman in World War I. Indeed, it can be argued that the German way of war in World War II was profoundly influenced by Rommel's World war I light infantry experiences and the book that grew out of those experiences.

Rommel's book, *Attacks,* was first published in 1937 under the title *Infanterie Grieft An,* and was a tremendous success in Germany before and during the war. By 1944 the book had gone through at least 18 printings, and its impact on the German army was incalculable. (As was its impact on Allied leaders such as George S. Patton, arguably the Allies' greatest master of maneuver warfare, who was "electrified" by the book and read and reread it "until he knew it by heart.")[1]

Attacks can be seen as a self-promoting book in which Rommel tells how he won the *Pour le 0 prite,* Germany's highest award in World War I—also known as the "Blue Max." His book *was* self-congratulatory and it *did* play a major role in placing him on the road to fame and glory—which ended with his forced suicide in 1944 when he was implicated in an assassination plot against Hitler. But *Attacks* was also an evangelical exhortation to a generation of German soldiers (and to any other soldier who will read and learn from it), building on the "Hutier" system of infiltration tactics and the "mission orders" of World War I, and telling of a better way to wage war. Every section ends with a detailed set of "observations" or lessons based upon his experiences, and those lessons, taken to heart by the Wehrmacht, were lessons in maneuver warfare from a true master.

For Germany, *Attacks* was a clarion call to institutionalize the embryonic maneuver warfare doctrine developed by the German army late in World War I. For a student of maneuver warfare, *Attacks* is a basic, fundamental primer. For an American army struggling to determine its fundamental doctrine and the place of light infantry within that doctrine, *Attacks* serves as a superb example of how maneuver warfare can be executed in the light infantry.

ROMMEL AND THE 12TH ISONZO BATTLE

> To capture the enemy's army is better than to destroy it.
>
> Sun Tzu[2]

The culmination of Rommel's World War I exploits was his decisive light infantry operation during the 12th Battle of Isonzo on the Italian front in World War I. Using a combination of penetration and infiltration techniques conducted in mountainous terrain under

adverse weather conditions, he conducted a campaign that was a textbook example of light infantry maneuver warfare operations.

The chief operational objective of the Italian army upon entering the First World War in May 1915 was the capture of the city of Trieste. During the following two years ten battles took place along the lower course of the Isonzo River, during which the Austrian forces defending on that front had been slowly pushed eastward and the attacking Italians approached Trieste. From August to September 1917, during the 11th Battle of Isonzo, the Italian army launched a massive 50-division attack in a narrow sector and succeeded in securing significant footholds across the Isonzo River and in the mountains west of the river. From here the Italians were in an excellent position to finally secure Trieste on their next attack.

Due to the danger this situation presented to their Austrian allies, the German High Command sent an army of seven veteran divisions to assist in a combined Austrian-German offensive to drive the Italians back across the Isonzo River and deep into their own national territory. That the Germans devoted such a large force to this operation shortly after the tremendous expenditure of men and material at Verdun and Flanders is an indication of how seriously the German High Command viewed the situation.

The German troops arrived at the front after a series of night marches, spending their days packed into what Rommel called "the most uncomfortable and inadequate accommodations imaginable." This careful operational security campaign was all for naught, since a Czech soldier with maps and orders outlining the offensive deserted to the Italian side. Thus, at dawn on 24 October 1917, after an extensive artillery preparation and under cover of a heavy rainfall, a combined German and Austrian force of approximately 15 divisions attacked against a forewarned Italian force, which was defending in rugged mountainous terrain in a series of three extensively prepared defensive belts.

In Chapter V of *Attacks* Rommel relates how the German and Austrian forces were able to quickly penetrate the artillery-devastated first defensive belt, as "the remnants of the garrison emerged from the ruins [of their positions] and hurried toward us with hands raised and faces distorted with fear." In this mountainous terrain Lieutenant Rommel, in command of a three-company mountain infantry detachment, was able to infiltrate the enemy's second defensive belt quickly, since most of its Italian garrison "had sought shelter in their dugouts from the streaming rain" and did not realize that the first zone had fallen. By working his way around them and approaching the defensive positions of the second zone of defense from the rear, Rommel was able to force the surrender of most of the second zone positions in his sector.

On the next day, 25 October, after extensive night reconnaissance operations, Rommel followed up the previous day's operation with a penetration of the Italian third defensive line. He was a master at maintaining the momentum of the attack by reinforcing and exploiting the success of earlier offensive operations. Time after time in World War I, light infantry elements under his command were able to infiltrate or penetrate enemy front line positions and rapidly move deep into their rear. The farther behind the front lines he went, the more unsuspecting was his enemy, and the more successful his operations. During 28 hours of constant operations on the 25th and 26th of October 1917, Rommel w as able to use these tactics to penetrate the Italian third defensive belt, capture Mount Matajur, and secure a key mountain pass that formed the main supply route for the northern portion of the Italian front.

Carrying full combat loads, the mountain infantry troops under Rommel's command "surmounted elevation differences of eight thousand feet uphill and three thousand feet downhill, and traversed a distance of twelve miles as the crow flies through unique, hostile mountain

fortifications." During these operations "the heavy machine gunners, carrying loads of ninety pounds, determined the rate of ascent."

It would be difficult to find a finer example of light infantry maneuver warfare operations. The total of prisoners and trophies captured by Rommel's small detachment during the entire 12th Battle of Isonzo amounted to "150 officers, 9000 men and 81 guns. Not included in these figures were the enemy units which, after they had been cut off . . . voluntarily laid down their arms and joined the columns of prisoners." The orders of the day of the German Alpine Corps stated that the capture of key terrain by Rommel's unit "caused the collapse of the whole structure of hostile resistance. . . [and] initiated the irresistible pursuit on a large scale." Rommel's success on this operation won him the *Pour le 0 prite,* the German army's highest award.

During these 52 hours of nearly constant operations, the Rommel detachment suffered only 6 dead and 30 wounded. Their safety lay in the unrelenting momentum of their offensive operations and the Italians' inability o react to the tempo of Rommel's operations.

Rommel's rapid success, his lopsided casualty figures, and the tremendous number of prisoners captured all presage a similar success achieved through the application of the same maneuver warfare principles during the blitzkrieg against France in 1940, and the Allied ground offensive against Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War. A careful analysis of this World War I operation reveals tactical principles that are fully applicable to future maneuver warfare operations, particularly light infantry operations in rugged terrain.

THE LESSONS

Gaps and Surfaces, Reconnaissance Pull, and Attack by Infiltration

> Now an army may be likened to water, for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so an army avoids strengths and strikes weakness. And as water shapes its flow in accordance with the Ground, so an army manages its victory in accordance with the situation of the enemy.
>
> Sun Tzu[3]

The first step in a maneuver warfare attack is generally to find or make a "gap" in enemy lines while avoiding or bypassing the "surfaces" (i.e., strengths) in the enemy lines. In rough terrain an infiltration operation (undetected movement through enemy lines), or a penetration operation (creating and exploiting a gap through enemy lines), and the extensive exploitation operations that should subsequently occur behind those lines, require a degree of stealth, cross-country mobility, flexibility, independent operations, logistic austerity, and training that is characteristic of the light infantry. Infiltration operations in particular are "natural" light infantry techniques which play to the light infantry's strengths.

At the operational level, good operations security and deception plans are essential to support penetration operations. Prior to the 12th Battle of Isonzo the Germans went to great effort to conceal the movement of their infantry divisions from enemy observations as they conducted the approach march to the front, moving their forces only at night and concealing them by day. In a modern operation of this nature such a deceptive movement would be much easier to accomplish with light infantry forces (vice armor or mechanized forces) since they can be so much more easily concealed from satellites, radar, and thermal imagery devices.

At the tactical level, light infantry penetration and infiltration operations such as Rommel conducted tend to blend into each other. Prior to any attack, a careful reconnaissance of enemy lines was always conducted to find gaps or areas where Rommel's forces could closely approach enemy lines. During the execution of the attack, he always tried to take advantage of terrain, weather, and weaknesses in enemy deployment to move his forces through enemy lines with a minimal amount of contact. In other words, he always tried to infiltrate. If he could infiltrate without any contact or by quietly surprising and dispatching a small enemy position or section of the line, then he did so. If the infiltration option failed, he was always ready to execute a penetration by: (1) having a supporting element, usually consisting of massed machine guns, in position to suppress enemy forces while (2) a small penetration element created and widened a gap and (3) his exploitation element (which usually consisted of the bulk of his forces) passed through the gap and moved deep into enemy lines.[4]

The infiltration or penetration was not the objective, it was simply a means to an end. The objective was to get through enemy front lines in order to get to logistic and command post areas and key terrain in the enemy rear. Rommel's reconnaissances were usually made while the men rested, and were almost always conducted by officers and NCOs. These leaders were more lightly equipped and did not suffer the fatigue that the men did, making them available for scouting missions.

The leaders conducting these patrols were usually given the freedom to make and secure gaps in the enemy lines if possible. If these reconnaissance patrols came across enemy elements that were not sufficiently alert, the recon patrol would capture them and thus create their own gap. Often these recon elements, in the purest form of "recon pull," made the gaps, sent back a runner, and "pulled" the rest of the unit through. Such gaps are a tenuous, ephemeral commodity, and Rommel always took immediate advantage of these opportunities, communicating back to his men a sense of urgency and the feeling that "a second's delay might snatch away victory."

In support of his recon pull, Rommel made extensive use of visual observation, using his binoculars more than any other single piece of equipment. In later operations he made excellent use of a powerful (captured) telescope and an ad hoc observation squad to conduct visual reconnaissance prior to attacking. In similar operations today's light infantry leader must make creative use of all available visual observation assets—such as TOW and Dragon thermal night-vision sights.

During the passage of his forces through three enemy lines of mountain defensive positions, Rommel made repeated use of stealthy approaches to surprise the enemy and infiltrate into his positions. On several occasions he took advantage of adverse weather, the fog of war, and fluid front line situations to deceive the enemy into believing that his troops were Italians. In one situation he prepared careful fire support and disposed his troops for a penetration operation, but in hopes of taking it by surprise he ordered a select squad under a handpicked leader to "move up the path as if he and his men were Italians returning from the front, to penetrate into the hostile position and capture the garrison . . . They were to do this with a minimum of shooting and hand grenade throwing. In case a battle developed they were assured of fire protection and support by the entire detachment." In this instance they succeeded in silently capturing a hostile dugout with 17 Italians and a machine gun. The gap was widened as dozens of additional Italians were captured by approaching their positions from the flank and rear, and the way was opened to move even deeper into the enemy positions—all without firing a shot.

The stealth of these attacks was maintained at all cost, and if some enemy soldiers chose to run rather than surrender, Rommel's men "did not fire on this fleeing enemy for fear of alarming the garrisons of positions located still higher up." Rommel found that "The farther we penetrated into the hostile zone of defense, the less prepared were the garrisons for our arrival, and the easier the fighting."

Recent large-scale night infiltration/penetration operations into Kuwait by the U.S. Marine Corps during the 1991 Gulf War have proven again the value of this classic technique. In this operation the 1st Marine Division under Major General Myatt executed a classical light infantry penetration with two regimental task forces (TF Taro and TF Grizzly), with a third, mechanized, task force (TF Ripper) passing through their gap and acting as an exploitation element which didn't stop until it reached Kuwait City. This operation and extensive operations in the 7th Infantry Division (Light), combining infiltration operations with imaginative use of passive night-vision devices and thermal imagery devices in rough terrain, demonstrate the tremendous potential for successful execution of light infantry infiltration operations on future battlefields.

Penetration, *Aufrollen, Schwerpunkt,* and *Auftragstaktik*

> There are occasions when the commands of the sovereign need not be obeyed … When you see the correct course, act: do not wait for orders.
>
> Sun Tzu[5]

When the initial passage through enemy lines of defense could not be accomplished solely through stealth, extensive fire support was required. Rommel was a master at using his machine guns to provide this fire support. He used extreme care in the placement and preparation of his machine guns, siting each gun himself and personally briefing each machine-gun crew on its field of fire and its role in the operation.

The machine guns would suppress the enemy line, and a small penetration element would rupture enemy lines and begin to roll up the flanks. During World War II these side thrusts to exploit the penetration and protect the flanks of the main body were institutionalized in the concept of the *Aufrollen.*

When the *Aufrollen* sealed off and protected the flanks the bulk of Rommel's forces, the exploitation element, would move rapidly through the gap and begin infiltration deep into the enemy rear. In World War II this highly flexible concentration of forces seeking out the weakest point of enemy resistance and driving deep into the enemy's rear would be known as the *Schwerpunkt*, a term first used by Clausewitz, which translates literally as "heavy force." The *Schwerpunkt* was to become such a vital aspect of the Wehrmacht's way of war that field Marshall von Hindenberg held that "an attack without a *Schwerpunkt* is like a man without character."

Again, the penetration was not the objective; the objective was to get into the enemy's rear. The penetration, the *Schwerpunkt*, and the *Aufrollen* were all a means to an end, and that end was decisive military action in the enemy's rear.

Rommel stated that during operations behind enemy lines he "did not worry about contact to right and left," believing that his element was "able to protect their own flanks" against a confused and unsuspecting enemy and knowing that there were strong reserves behind him. The strong reserve is, of course, an essential element in maneuver warfare. The German

High Command encouraged and supported such penetration operations in their attack orders, which in this case stated: "Without limiting the day's activities in space and time, continue the advance to the west, knowing that we have strong reserves near and behind us."

On one occasion Rommel flatly disobeyed a written order from his battalion commander to pull back. Knowing the commander's intent, and knowing that "the battalion order was given without knowledge of the situation," Rommel went on to execute a successful attack and secure Mount Matajur. His relationship with his battalion commander was such that he knew he could to this, and not only was he *not* reprimanded for his action, but both he and his battalion commander received the *Pour le 0 prite* for this achievement.

A somewhat similar action occurred during the 1989 invasion of Panama, when an AC-130 gunship crew refused repeated orders to fire on an enemy position, because they had reason to believe there were friendly troops there. It turned out that there *were* friendly troops on that location and the crew of the gunship was decorated for their refusal to obey orders. Commending individuals for refusing to obey uninformed orders is an important step in developing an *Auftragstaktik* environment. Hopefully this incident indicates that the Prussian concept embodied in the classic statement, "The King made you a major because he believed you knew when *not* to obey" exists to some degree in our armed forces. But the real test is in what would happen if Rommel or this AC-130 crew had been wrong. Obviously some form of reprimand is appropriate when initiative results in failure, but if we truly believe in giving subordinates room to make "errors of commission" (as opposed to "errors of omission," which should never be tolerated), then our judgment must be tempered with a desire to continue to nurture the precious flame of initiative in the breasts of subordinates. This is a principle of leader development that is well represented by the defense of a controversial incident involving cadets at the British Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. "We have learned," responded the authorities at Sandhurst, "that a wild young man can learn wisdom as he grows older—if he survives—but a spiritless young man cannot learn the dash that wins battles."[6]

Throughout the Isonzo operation Rommel demonstrated extraordinary initiative and spirit, but his actions were guided by the overall commander's intent, and the combination of (1) a high command which delegated the highest levels of independence and freedom of action to its subordinates with (2) a subordinate who had the initiative to utilize this freedom was one of the keys to the tremendous German success in that battle. But the repercussions of this success went beyond its operational and strategic impact on World War I. The 12th Battle of Isonzo, and its widespread publication in *Attacks*, set the standard for the *Auftragstaktik*, or mission orders, environment, which was essential to the success of a later generation of German soldiers.

The Exploitation

> When a dam is broken, the water cascades with irresistible force. Now the shape of an army resembles water. Take advantage of the enemy's unpreparedness; attack him when he does not expect it; avoid his strength and strike his emptiness and like water, one can oppose you.
>
> Sun Tzu[7]

Once he had penetrated the enemy front line, Rommel was repeatedly able to capture units far larger than his simply by approaching them from a direction they had thought to be secure. Rommel's confidence, pose, and audacity were the key elements in convincing the

enemy to surrender. When a unit feels itself to be safe behind its own friendly lines, it is particularly vulnerable once it is cut off from the authority of its superiors and the support of its sister units. Rommel often captured hundreds of prisoners with only a few audacious soldiers. Although some potential enemy forces may be somewhat less inclined to surrender than were Rommel's Italians (or Schwarzkopf's Iraqis), all human beings are vulnerable to the same psychological processes when they are surrounded or when they are suddenly confronted with aggressive action at a time when they imagined themselves to be safe. The potential for such mass surrenders is there for any unit that can penetrate the enemy front line and rapidly and audaciously exploit its position in the enemy's rear.

The fact that Rommel was able to surprise so many enemy forces led him to strongly emphasize the importance of 360-degree security by all units, regardless of their proximity to the front, and the requirement for providing adequate patrolling operations. He stated that "it is not enough to have watchful sentries in the main position; the forward area must be constantly surveyed by patrols, especially in bad weather and in irregular and covered terrain." Today a 360-degree application of early warning systems and thermal imagery devices would be an important part of this process.

During these operations behind enemy lines any close-range, chance contacts with moving enemy elements were made on twisty mountain trails and roads. Rommel almost always "got the drop" on the enemy during these chance contacts, since his personnel were alert and expecting contact and the enemy was moving through the (assumed) safety of his own rear lines. One technique used repeatedly and successfully was "holding the enemy, who was [usually] superior in numbers and weapons, frontally and simultaneously attacking him in flank and rear with assault squads." During these contacts in the enemy rear the only fire support available to Rommel was his own internal machine-gun assets. In the absence of artillery support, he was a master at stripping out his detachment's medium *and* light machine guns to place massed fire on the enemy while his troops approached. A modern-day equivalent might be found in massing the grenade launchers and squad automatic weapons of infantry squads.

On one occasion, Rommel took advantage of a bend in a mountain pass (behind the enemy lines on a main supply route) to collect enemy vehicles as they went about their business. At one time they took over 100 prisoners and 50 vehicles. In ambushes against a cautions and deployed enemy, he attacked at maximum effective range. Against an unprepared and undeployed enemy, he waited until they were at point-blank range, usually giving them an opportunity to surrender first.

Light Infantry Operations in Restrictive Terrain

> The wise general sees to it that his troops feed on the enemy, for one bushel of the enemy's provisions is equivalent to twenty of his . . . In transporting provisions for a distance of one thousand *li*, twenty bushels will be consumed in delivering one to the enemy . . . If difficult terrain must be crossed even more is required.
>
> Sun Tzu[8]

One of the most difficult and impressive aspects of this operation was that it was conducted in rugged mountainous terrain. The capability of light infantry to conduct movement of heavily laden soldiers over this kind of terrain is a source of considerable active discussion

and concern among soldiers. The fact that Rommel was able to move his command, burdened with loads up to 90 pounds, over this terrain and through "unique, hostile mountain fortifications" is a testimony to the capability of light infantry.

Past experience with ammunition supply problems in mountain operations led the German mountain infantry companies to carry extra ammunition for the machine-gun companies. Although the weight of the machine guns slowed down the rate of movement, they were echeloned far forward so that there was "a strong fire force fight at hand" if they met resistance. This was not always the case and depending on the tactical situation, Rommel sometimes moved forward in an almost helter-skelter fashion to secure deep objectives, leaving slow moving personnel behind to come up when they could. One interesting point in this mountain movement is the fact that Rommel made extensive use of wire communications, always running wire behind him as he moved forward. Often this wire served as a navigation aid for follow-on elements and runners, who were able to use the wire as a guide during night movements in pouring rain. Today, bad radio communications, poor land navigation, and breaks in contact are some of the recurring problems in the conduct of mountain operations. Combined with this potential enemy emphasis on radio electronic combat, which can make radio communications an extremely risky business. The fact that Rommel was able to run extensive wire communications in this environment and then use it as a navigational aid is a useful lesson.

In mountainous terrain the resupply of light infantry forces penetrating deep into enemy territory is another significant problem, but the momentum of his attack made it possible for Rommel's forces to repeatedly partake of the supplies found in the enemy vehicles and positions they captured. In the attack his unit traveled light, knowing that if they were stalled they would be able to bring forward their mess elements, and if they were successful, they would be able to live off of the enemy's supplies. He and his men made good use of captured enemy pack animals and bicycles during attacks. (Had he needed vehicular mobility it would have been readily available to him by using the vehicles captured in his ambushes, but his strength was in his ability to approach from unexpected directions over rough terrain.) In a later operation they were even able to use clean, dry underwear and sleeping gear from a captured Italian laundry depot, and on several occasions they came to rely "on the abundant weapons and stores of ammunition" captured from the Italians. The most common enemy asset, and that which seemed to have given him and his men the most joy, was the enemy's food. "The contents of the [captured] vehicles offered us starved warriors unexpected delicacies. Chocolate, eggs, preserves, grapes, wine and white bread were unpacked and distributed. The worthy . . . troopers . . . were served first . . . morale two miles behind the enemy front was wonderful!"

Tempo, Tempo, Tempo

> What is of the greatest importance in war is extraordinary speed; one cannot afford to neglect opportunity . . . An attack may lack ingenuity, but it must be delivered with supernatural speed.
>
> Sun Tzu[9]

Probably the most important and consistent lesson to be gained from this operation is the critical necessity of maintaining the momentum of the attack. Over and over again Rommel had to "demand superhuman efforts" from his exhausted troops, knowing that the momentum of the offensive "must not be allowed to bog down." He maintained his remarkable momentum by

motivating his troops to incredible efforts, using his leaders to conduct reconnaissance during halts, constantly attacking his bewildered enemy before word of his onslaughts had reached them, and never stopping until he had secured his ultimate objective of key terrain deep in the enemy's rear—key objectives of such vital importance that, in coordination with the main effort, its seizure caused the collapse of the entire enemy front.

SUNTZU, ORDINARY-EXTRAORDINARY FORCES, HUTIER TACTICS, AND THE EVOLUTION OF WARFARE

> In battle there are only the normal and extraordinary forces, but their combinations are limitless; no one can comprehend them all.
>
> Sun Tzu[10]

The opportunity to conduct the kind of maneuver-based operations that Rommel expemplified atop Mount Matajur may be comparatively rare, even in an army that institutionalizes it as doctrine. In many instances only a few units will have the opportunity to maneuver, and other forces will reinforce the penetration, but many others will (for a variety of reasons) have to engage in more conventional operations. Sun Tzu referred to this dichotomy between maneuver and attrition forces "ordinary" and "extraordinary" forces. Sun Tzu's "extraordinary-ordinary" dichotomy is a good way to look at maneuver vs. attrition warfare. The objective is to unhinge the enemy's defense so as to make his positions no longer relevant, ideally defeating him without a fight. But there *are* times when both extraordinary *and* ordinary (i.e., maneuver and attrition) forces are needed, and often the key is in finding the right balance between the two. Brig. Gen (then Colonel) Huba Wass de Czege made just such a point in a letter to *Army* magazine when he said:

> People who read maneuver warfare advocates as advocating "dancing around the enemy" or "bloodless war" have misread them. Maneuver warfare advocates do say, and I most whole heartedly agree, that defeat mechanisms are not limited to physically killing people and breaking things. The will to fight is at the nub of all defeat mechanisms.
>
> In many instances . . . the only effective way to get at the will is to kill and break in a sustained, pitched fight: to win by direct application of superior force, as Gen. Douglas MacArthur was forced to do at Buna and Gona in New Guinea.
>
> One should always look for a way to break the enemy's will and capacity to resist in other ways, however. If a strongpoint can be passed, invested and reduced on our terms it should be.
>
> Gen. MacArthur bypassed some islands which were later evacuated by the Japanese themselves. This maneuver strategy was the major element of Gen. MacArthur's blueprint for victory.

Sun Tzu presaged the need for maneuver-oriented operations over two thousand years ago, and MacArthur refined them in the Pacific in World War II, but it was the German army in World War II that first began to institutionalize maneuver warfare. The so called "Hutier tactics" used so successfully by Rommel during this battle were named after General Oskar von Hutier, whose German Eighth Army first used these tactics in the attack on Riga on 1 September 1917. The same "storm troop, soft spot" tactics were then used at the 12th Battle of Isonzo (also called

Caporetto), where Rommel gained his fame and the Italians lost over 300,000 men and were almost taken out of the war. Hutier tactics were then used for the first time on the western front on 30 November 1917 at Cambrai in response to the British tank attack, thereby successfully responding to a powerful technological innovation with an equally powerful doctrinal innovation. In March 1918 the Germans applied Hutier tactics on a large scale on the western front in one last effort to win the war. These new tactics:

> …succeeded far beyond expectation, particularly in the sector of Hutier, "the apostle of the surprise attack," where his army advanced without check. He took 50,000 prisoners, crushed the Fifth British Army, and drove a wedge between British and French forces. Fortunately for the allies, Ludendorff at this point demonstrated a singular lack of strategic grasp. Of the three armies he had employed in the offensive, only Hutier's continued to make progress; yet Ludendorff failed to exploit this success by redirecting the other two along Hutier's axis. Had Ludendorff done so, he could possibly have split the French and British armies and perhaps gained a Sedan 22 years earlier.[11]

But that is not the end of the story for Rommel, or for Hutier tactics. The history of warfare is a record of natural selection in the harshest of all possible environments, and in this "survival of the fittest" environment the army that completes the next evolutionary development will have a significant advantage over its enemies. Germany learned from its defeat and developed a new style of warfare in World War II. Defeat is often a catalyst for change—assuming, of course, that your enemies permit you to remain in existence long enough to learn from your defeat. Just as Germany's defeat and humiliation in World War I forced them to develop a new stage of warfare, so too does America's defeat and humiliation in Vietnam appear to have made possible the reforms that resulted in our own development and our overwhelming victory in Iraq.

Of course, Rommel was *only* fighting the Italians, the Wehrmacht was *only* fighting the French and the Poles, the Israeli Defense Force was *only* fighting the Arabs, and General Schwarzkopf was *only* fighting the Iraqis. And today we downplay the degree to which each of these "classically inept" armies were respected and feared in their time. But, the Italians were beating the Austrians quiet handily when Rommel's "supple offensive tactics" (i.e., the Hutier, "Storm trooper" infiltration tactics that represented embryonic maneuver warfare doctrine) caused the collapse of their entire front. Looking at the numbers, equipment and the expertise involved, no one in the West dreamed that France (which had numerical superiority in tanks and men[12]) would fall to the Wehrmacht as quickly and easily as she did. The Arabs were equipped with the best and largest armies money could buy when they were beaten by the badly outnumbered Israelis in seven days in 1967, and again in 1973. And does anyone remember the predictions of "thousands" of casualties we would suffer against the "battle-hardened" Iraqi Republican Guard? Was there *any* single major analyst who called that one right?

In every one of these examples we see the same lopsided casualty rate, the same enormous numbers of prisoners, and the same shock and surprise on the part of the "experts" who had failed to take doctrine and human frailty into account. What these cases all have in common is *not* the relative size or technology of the armies involved.

In every one of these cases the key factor is doctrine—a doctrine that is, perhaps, an evolutionary new development in warfare; a doctrine systematically focused on the center of

gravity in order to defeat the enemy's *will* to fight rather than his *ability* to fight. Therein lies the path to Mount Matajur, the path to glory, and the path to decisive victory.

Notes

1. All quotes, unless otherwise noted, are from Erwin Rommel's *Attacks* (New York: Athena Press, 1979).
2. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (New York: Oxford Press, 1971), p. 77.
3. Ibid., p. 101.
4. These concepts are Rommel's, but specific organizational terms such as gaps, surfaces, reconnaissance pull, suppression element, penetration element, and exploitation element are all drawn from William S. Lind and Col. Michael Wyly's *Maneuver Warfare Handbook* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1985). This excellent book rates with *Attacks* as an essential maneuver warfare primer which provides an organized and systematic set of basic maneuver warfare terms and concepts.
5. Sun Tzu, p. 112.
6. As quoted in John Masters' *Bugles and a Tiger* (New York: Viking Press, 1956), p. 41. Masters' autobiographical account in *Bugles and a Tiger* is an excellent example of light infantry operations in low-density warfare in the British army prior to World War II. His sequel, *The Road Past Mandalay* (New York: Harpers, 1961), tells of his experience with battalion- and brigade- strength Chindit operations behind Japanese lines in Burma during World War II. The *Road Past Mandalay* serves as a superb example of the potential and the limitations associated with light infantry, maneuver warfare operations in mid- to high-*density* warfare," rather than the currently doctrinally correct terms "low-, mid-, and high-*intensity* warfare." To the soldier getting shot a, it is *all* equally intense; the distinguishing factor is the density of the combatants.)
7. Sun Tzu, p. 89.
8. Ibid., p. 75.
9. Ibid., pp. 69, 73.
10. Ibid., p. 92.
11. See John English's *A Perspective on Infantry* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), pp. 26, 36. English goes on to point out that there is no reason to believe that Hutier was actually responsible for inventing these tactics. "If any one deserves credit," says English, "it is probably Ludendorff."
12. von Mellenthin and Stofli's *NATO under Attack* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1984) provides an excellent historical recap:

Numbers	*France*	*Germany*
Men	3,500,000[a]	2,800,000
Tanks	3,800	2,574
Antitank guns	12,600	12,800

a. Combines numbers for French, British, Dutch, and Belgian troops.

In addition, von Mellenthin reports that the French are generally accepted to have had technological superiority in tanks (the French SOMUA vs. the German PzKwIII) and antitank guns (47 mm vs. 37 mm). The only clear-cut numerical and technological superiority the Germans had was in tactical aircraft.