

**Navy Warfare Publication 3**

***Fleet Warfare***

**March 2021**



**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**  
NAVY WARFARE DEVELOPMENT COMMAND  
1528 PIERSEY STREET  
NORFOLK, VA 23511-2723

September 2022

LETTER OF PROMULGATION

1. Change 1 to NWP 3 (MAR 2021), Fleet Warfare, is hereby approved and promulgated as part of the Navy Warfare Library (NWL) as a doctrinal publication. It supersedes NWP 3 (MAR 2021).
2. Change 1 to NWP 3 incorporates minor definition changes contained in these revisions to joint doctrine: JP 1 volume 1, Joint Warfighting; JP 2-0, Joint Intelligence; JP 3-0, Joint Campaigns and Operations; and JP 5-0, Joint Planning. These joint doctrine publications revised definitions for these terms:
  - Strategic level of warfare
  - Operational level of warfare
  - Tactical level of warfare
  - Campaigning
  - Commander's intent
  - Major operation
  - Operational environment
  - Strategy.
3. Change 1 to NWP 3 incorporates the revised definitions of the affected terms. There are no substantive changes to the content of NWP 3. It is developed in accordance with NTRP 1-01 (JUN 2021), The Navy Warfare Library User Manual.
4. Change 1 to NWP 3 guides how the Navy fights as a unified force in an era of great power competition. It informs and aligns personnel and organizations on the fundamentals of fleet warfare at the operational level of warfare. Ultimately, Change 1 to NWP 3 enhances fleet-centric warfighting effectiveness through establishing a framework for the execution of fleet warfare at the operational level of warfare.
5. Change 1 to NWP 3 is unclassified. It is approved for public release; distribution is unlimited. This change is developed with the intent that the entire publication is to be reprinted and distributed in its entirety. A list of the changes is posted in the supporting documents folder of the publication in NWL at <https://doctrine.navy.mil/default.aspx>

M. R. DURKIN  
Executive Director  
Navy Warfare Development Command

## FOREWORD

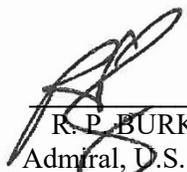
The United States Navy provides sea power for the security and prosperity of our nation. Sea power is the influence exerted by our ability to impose conditions from, and within, the maritime domain in support of our national objectives. Our sea power is founded upon our demonstrated ability to prevail in fleet warfare.

Fleet warfare—the conflict between naval forces for freedom of action throughout the maritime domain—is an infrequent, but epochal, event. It is often the culmination of years of competition between strategic adversaries that have made national investments to develop viable fleet capabilities. Given the immense resources required to develop sea power on a global, or even regional scale, fleet capability lost in combat can be nearly impossible to recover in a strategically relevant time frame. History demonstrates that when you lose the ability to contest at sea, you lose the sea, save for the benevolence of the victors. The effects resulting from naval battles and campaigns can last decades.

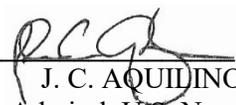
Navy Warfare Publication (NWP) 3, Fleet Warfare, provides the doctrinal framework for Navy warfare at the operational level of warfare (OLW). NWP 3 is the first in a series of planned single-digit publications focused on fleet warfare at the OLW, that conceptual arena where tactical activity is orchestrated for strategic effect. Like all doctrine publications, NWP 3 is authoritative but not prescriptive, and requires judgment in application.

Written to answer the Chief of Naval Operations' call to “Master Fleet Level Warfare” by addressing doctrinal gaps at the OLW, NWP 3 serves to standardize, align, and focus individual and collective understanding and efforts of numbered fleet and component command staffs and commanders working at the OLW.

Our ability to prevail in fleet warfare is the foundation of our nation's sea power. It requires our relentless focus.



R. P. BURKE  
Admiral, U.S. Navy  
Commander, U.S. Naval  
Forces Europe/Africa



J. C. AQUILINO  
Admiral, U.S. Navy  
Commander, U.S.  
Pacific Fleet



C. W. GRADY  
Admiral, U.S. Navy  
Commander, U.S. Fleet  
Forces Command

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# I

## **Fleet Warfare**

### **INTRODUCTION**

NWP 3 provides the doctrinal foundation for fleet warfare at the operational level of warfare (OLW).

Chapter I outlines the architecture of naval warfare, doctrinally defines fleet warfare, and discusses how advancing technology and a shifting geopolitical environment shape our approach to fleet warfare.

Chapter II reviews the levels of warfare construct, provides an operational framework within the maritime domain, identifies naval combat processes that underpin our operational concept, and distinguishes campaigns inherent in fleet warfare.

Chapter III provides elements of operational art and design for consideration in the orchestration of tactical activity for strategic success, the sole objective of the OLW.

Chapter IV provides insight regarding organization and command and control (C2) as they pertain to fleet warfare.

Appendix A is a case study of the Battle of the Philippine Sea that highlights timeless lessons regarding the complexities and ambiguities inherent in fleet warfare.

NWP 3 serves to standardize, align, and focus individual and collective understanding and efforts of numbered fleet and component command staffs working at the OLW to prepare for and, when necessary, engage in fleet warfare.

## THE ARCHITECTURE OF NAVAL WARFARE

The United States Navy provides sea power for the security and prosperity of our nation.

The Navy does this, implicitly in peace, explicitly in war, by establishing, maintaining, or executing naval functions, namely sea control, power projection, deterrence, maritime security, and sealift.<sup>1</sup> Periodically, other functions may be required based on the circumstances of the strategic situation, but our nation has historically relied upon these five functions to protect and defend national interests in peace and war. They are the functions required to achieve and enable strategic effects; they are objectives at the OLV. The collective achievement of these functions leads to maritime superiority, that degree of dominance of one force over another that permits the conduct of maritime operations by the former, and its related land, maritime, and air forces at a given time and place without prohibitive interference by the latter.

Naval warfare areas—air warfare, air/missile defense, expeditionary warfare, information warfare, strike warfare, surface warfare, and undersea warfare—are the means by which the Navy achieves its operational objectives.

In short, naval functions are “what” the Navy does; warfare areas are “how” the Navy does it. In fleet warfare, naval forces win battles at the tactical level of warfare (TLW) in pursuit of functional or maritime superiority at the operational level. This, in turn, enables or creates strategic effects. Figure 1-1 depicts these relationships using an ends, ways, and means construct.

The Navy, United States Marine Corps, and the United States Coast Guard collectively form the nation’s Naval Service.<sup>2</sup> The Naval Service provides integrated, complementary, and unique capabilities throughout the maritime domain to achieve national interests. We recognize, leverage, and rely upon the capabilities that each brings to bear within the context of naval and joint operations. Within the Naval Service, the Navy has the clear and fundamental responsibility to control the seas, thereby enabling all other naval functions and empowering the joint force. Fleet warfare is the highest expression of our responsibility to our nation and our citizens in fulfilling that mandate.

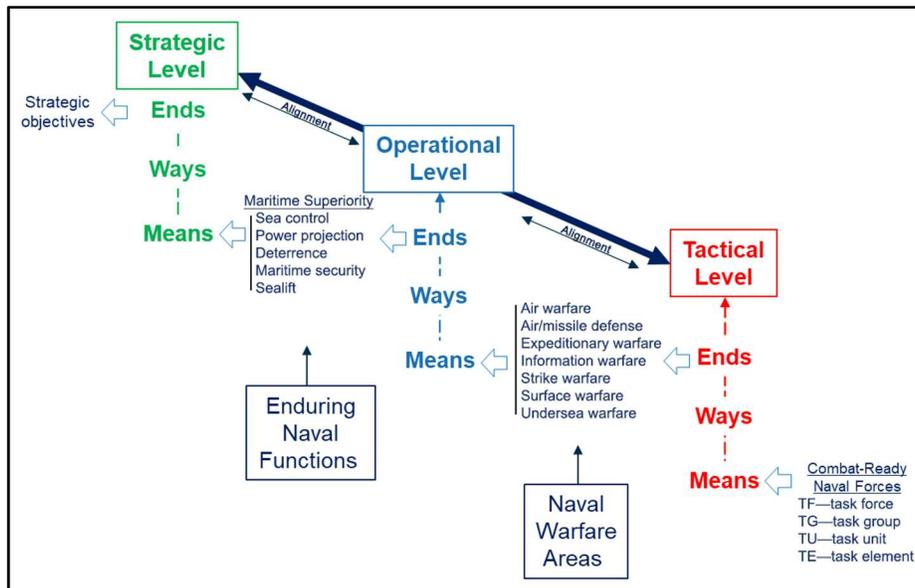
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<sup>1</sup> Naval Doctrine Publication (NDP) 1, Naval Warfare.

<sup>2</sup> Per Title 10, United States Code (U.S.C.) §101, and Title 14 U.S.C. §1-3, the Coast Guard is “a military service and a branch of the armed forces of the United States at all times.” The Coast Guard may, at any time, provide forces and/or perform its military functions in support of naval component or combatant commanders. The Coast Guard is also, at all times, a Federal maritime law enforcement agency.”

*Our fleet will be a potent, formidable force that competes around the world every day, deterring those who would challenge us while reassuring our allies and partners. Joining with the Marine Corps, we will deliver decisive integrated all-domain naval power when called.*

ADM Michael Gilday, Chief of Naval Operations



**Figure 1-1. The Architecture of Naval Warfare.** This figure depicts the ends, ways, and means relationship among naval forces, warfare areas, naval functions and strategic objectives. Commanders working at the OLW align means (tactical excellence across warfare areas),<sup>3</sup> ways (C2, operational art, operational design), and ends (execution of naval functions) in orchestrating tactical activity to achieve functional or maritime superiority for strategic effect.

<sup>3</sup> Defined as integrated all-domain naval power in Advantage at Sea, Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power, December, 2020.

## FLEET WARFARE

Fleet warfare is the conflict between naval forces for freedom of action throughout the maritime domain. At its core, it is a competition for sea control.

Fleet warfare establishes, maintains, and exploits maritime superiority in support of strategic objectives. Whether achieved through a single “Mahan-esque” decisive fleet battle or a protracted war of episodic engagements, naval campaigns ultimately enable our ability to control the sea, wherever and whenever needed.<sup>4</sup>

Successful fleet warfare achieves sea control to protect lines of communication; enable power projection; permit the seaborne delivery of required resources; and deter, restrict, or deny the use of the maritime domain by the enemy. These operational objectives are necessary to create desired strategic effects. A variety of factors and circumstance will determine the ways in which naval functions are accomplished and coordinated in fleet warfare, but the baseline requirement is unambiguous, sea control is the bedrock of sea power. Figure 1-2 depicts these relationships across levels of warfare.

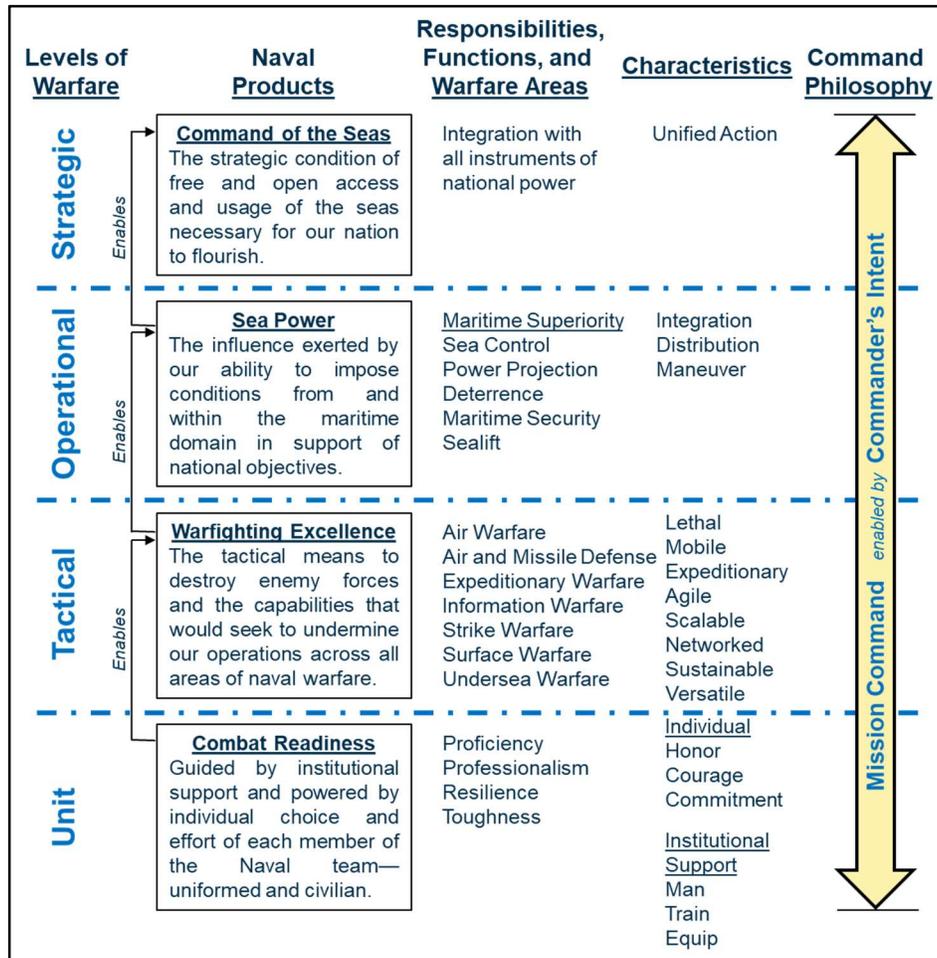
The Navy provides warfighting capabilities to the joint force commander (JFC) as part of a joint force that operates in all domains. Fundamentally, however, freedom of action in the maritime domain is the Navy’s greatest contribution to the joint team.

*For a maritime power at least it is obvious that this must be so: for in any circumstances it is impossible for such a power either to establish its defense or develop fully its offense without securing a working control of the seas without aggressive action against the enemy’s fleets.*

Julian Corbett  
Some Principles of Maritime Strategy

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<sup>4</sup> RADM Alfred Thayer Mahan proposed that control of the sea’s communications could be obtained through naval battles between large-scale ships that resulted in a decisive and clear-cut victory, which came to be known as the “decisive battle.” B.H. Liddell Hart, among others, evolved thinking of the decisive battle: “Under the new conditions of warfare, the cumulative effect of partial success, or even threat, at a number of points may be greater than the effect of complete success at one point.” Hart, B.H. Liddell. *Strategy*, Penguin Books, 1991, p. 333.



**Figure 1-2. Navy Warfare Framework.** This chart depicts the relationships between the naval products of each level of warfare. Combat readiness at the unit level enables warfighting excellence at the tactical level, which in turn generates sea power at the operational level, which is used to create effects at the strategic level. Fundamental among them is free and open access and usage of the seas necessary for our nation to flourish in peace and prevail in war. Responsibilities, functions, and warfare areas, and characteristics aligning with each level of warfare are listed alongside. Mission command, enabled by commander’s intent, is the command philosophy of the Navy throughout all levels of warfare.

## THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF FLEET WARFARE

### **People's Republic of China (PRC) White Paper: China's National Defense in the New Era, July 2019**

*Driven by the new round of technological and industrial revolution, the application of cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), quantum information, big data, cloud computing and the Internet of Things is gathering pace in the military field. International military competition is undergoing historic changes. New and high-tech military technologies based on IT are developing rapidly. There is a prevailing trend to develop long-range precision, intelligent, stealthy or unmanned weaponry and equipment. War is evolving in form towards informationized [sic] warfare, and intelligent warfare is on the horizon.<sup>5</sup>*

The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China

Advances in technology have always changed the character of warfare. Historically, new capabilities enabled by those advances required adaptations in tactics and C2 constructs to fully realize their warfighting potential. The technological enhancements of our time are redefining warfare in the maritime domain, and accordingly, mandate a reconsideration of fleet tactics and a mastery of fleet level warfare.<sup>6</sup>

Warfighting capabilities—naval, joint, and national—are increasingly interdependent on integration between multiple commanders. Furthermore, with the advent of long-range precision weapons, short reaction times, and complex intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting (ISRT), the scope of the threat arranged against our forces means that no single element of the naval or joint force can survive and prevail alone. Capabilities of sensors and weapons continue to increase and extend across oceanic distances. The promise of directed energy, hypersonics, man-machine teaming, ubiquitous unmanned entities, and artificial intelligence all suggest that the pace of change will only accelerate in the future.

To fully leverage technological advances and counter associated threats, commanders must increasingly integrate their awareness, authorities, and arsenals to fight as one—to fight as a fleet.

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<sup>5</sup> The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China July 2019, [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content\\_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html).

<sup>6</sup> CNO Fragmentary Order (FRAGO) 01/2019, A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority, highlights the need and directs the Navy to master fleet-level warfare to increase our warfighting capability. Dec 2019, p. 3.

**Technological advances require new tactics and C2 constructs to maximize warfighting effectiveness.**

The installation of radar on warships, including destroyers, during the 1942 Guadalcanal campaign did not lead to initial tactical success, despite the advantages the technology provided.<sup>7</sup>

“In past battles such as Tassafaronga, destroyer commanders experienced delays in getting approval to launch torpedoes that ruined their targeting solutions and negated the effects of any torpedoes the ships eventually fired. Also, the cruisers with which the destroyers were grouped usually started firing as soon as they detected the enemy on their radars, giving away the position of the task force and removing the element of surprise needed for a successful torpedo attack. Night surface battles unfolded quickly and by the time destroyer commanders got permission from the task force commander to launch torpedoes, the optimal moment had passed. Operating separately and with authority to fire torpedoes, destroyers could range in front of the cruiser line, launch a devastating surprise torpedo attack, and then maneuver to assist the cruisers as they opened fire with their guns. However, such independence ran counter to the common wisdom of the time.”<sup>8</sup>

It was not until a destroyer squadron commodore, CAPT Arleigh Burke, proposed re-arranging the traditional line of battle, moving torpedo-firing destroyers to the vanguard, and obtained mission command authority to engage independently upon radar contact, that U.S. warships were able to take advantage of the promise of new radar technology to defeat the Japanese in night surface action.<sup>9</sup>

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7 See James D. Hornfischer’s *Neptune’s Inferno*, Chapter 7, The Martyring of Task Group 62.6, for a riveting account of the costs of failing to tactically innovate.

8 Spence, Johnny Hampton. *South Pacific Destroyers: The United States Navy and the Challenges of Night Surface Combat in the Solomons Islands during World War II*. (2009). Electronic Theses and Dissertations. Paper 1865. <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/1865>.

9 “At the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay, on board the USS Charles Ausburne (DD-570) at the van of the formation, Burke gained radar contact, immediately seized the initiative, and went on the offensive before the enemy knew the Little Beavers (ships of Destroyer Squadron 23) were there. The battle resulted in two Imperial Japanese Navy ships sunk, four degraded by collisions as they flailed in reaction to the attack, and an overall retreat. The 10-second advantage was perfected by Burke’s squadron at the Battle of Cape St. George, which occurred deep in enemy waters on Thanksgiving Day, 1943. The squadron destroyed three enemy ships, damaged another, and suffered no losses of their own.” CAPT William Daly, *Ten Seconds to Live or Die*, Proceedings, December 2018, Vol. 144/12/1,390.

## *Fleet Warfare*

To maintain a warfighting advantage over adversaries and effectively employ our growing suite of capabilities we must master fleet level warfare. Consolidating warfighting at the fleet level enables the synthesis of new capabilities, C2, and tactics to maximize naval power at the tactical level. The numbered fleet commander (NFC) can integrate fleet and joint capabilities (e.g., space, cyberspace, electromagnetic battle space (EMBS),<sup>10</sup> joint fires, aerial refueling, surveillance, logistics, special operations forces) into tactical operations, employing naval power in a holistic manner across platforms and domains without regard to traditional platform or organizational boundaries.<sup>11</sup>

Consolidating warfighting at the fleet level does not elevate fighting to the OLW; rather it maximizes naval power necessary for victory at the TLW.

Synthesizing naval power at the fleet level is a natural evolution required by the expansion of sensor and weapon system capabilities in an era of information, missile, and robotics warfare—an era characterized by increased operational reach and precision, pervasive ISRT, and the continued introduction and improvement of new technologies. Fleet warfare in this accelerated and technologically enhanced age requires the expansion of tactical awareness—and intensity—beyond isolated deployed forces, to encompass entire fleets.

Fleet warfare requires the integration of capabilities inherent within multiple distributed tactical forces with the broader capabilities accessible by NFCs and their maritime operations centers (MOCs). Tactical success will increasingly rely on a MOC's ability to integrate interfleet, joint, multinational, and national capabilities in a manner that can contribute to the tactical fight in a time-sensitive environment. ADM Arleigh Burke's famous admonition at the commissioning of his namesake destroyer, "This ship was built to fight. You had better know how!" is appropriate to the larger MOC and fleet audience whose staffing skills and collaborative preparation must combine with warfighting acumen to deliver capabilities within the speed required of today's, and tomorrow's, naval battle. In prosecuting fleet warfare, the MOC has two responsibilities: deliver capabilities to our naval forces and create effects against their opponents.

Thus, the changing character of naval warfare requires the synthesis of naval power at the fleet level. A fleet-centric approach is required to ensure our freedom of action throughout the maritime domain.

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10 Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) Instruction 2400.3, Electromagnetic Battle Space, specifies: "The DON shall: (1) Recognize the EMBS as the operational battle space comprised of all electromagnetic radiation used by military forces; (2) Strive to achieve and maintain EMBS superiority in order to accomplish its warfighting mission."

11 Commander, United States Fleet Forces Command, Fleet Design, 8 Jan 2017.

The speed of warfare in a technologically enhanced environment will challenge in-stride opportunities for adaptation of fleet tactics. Thus, time must be sourced to experiment and train to fight as a fleet ... a difficult challenge given the many and competing demands of operational and maintenance schedules, and one that is only increased by the accelerating pace of change. Nonetheless, fleet-level exercises are necessary, both to prepare for fleet warfare at the high end of the competition continuum, and demonstrate our capabilities lower on the scale to influence and deter adversaries from escalating to such extremes.

Though the character of fleet warfare will inexorably change, the objectives remain the same. Fleet will engage fleet—in some form—to battle for sea control required to create strategic effects.

### FLEET WARFARE AND GREAT POWER COMPETITION

#### **PRC White Paper: China's National Defense in the New Era July 2019**

*"International strategic competition is on the rise. The US has adjusted its national security and defense strategies and adopted unilateral policies. It has provoked and intensified competition among major countries, significantly increased its defense expenditure, pushed for additional capacity in nuclear, outer space, cyber and missile defense, and undermined global strategic stability ... In line with the strategic requirements of near seas defense and far seas protection, the PLAN is speeding up the transition of its tasks from defense on the near seas to protection missions on the far seas, and improving its capabilities for strategic deterrence and counterattack, maritime maneuver operations, maritime joint operations, comprehensive defense, and integrated support, so as to build a strong and modernized naval force."<sup>12</sup>*

The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China

Great power competition (GPC) is a recurring, though episodic, condition throughout history, "great" being a relative term, not absolute. Though there is no single, acknowledged definition of GPC, it is suitable here to consider it as the condition where two or more nations have exceptional capabilities that enable relatively unconstrained pursuit of their national objectives, save for the capabilities of the other "great" powers.

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<sup>12</sup> The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China July 2019, Available at: [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content\\_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html).

## *Fleet Warfare*

For the purposes of fleet warfare, GPC means that other nations can generate capabilities that are sufficiently massed, masked, and/or advanced to prevent our freedom of action in the maritime domain.

Warfare against an enemy of such resource and reach will require the Navy to operate as a globally unified force, orchestrating naval power in a manner that overcomes geographic, organizational, and administrative boundaries. It will require that commanders align, share, and synchronize assets, capabilities, operations, and understanding across the globe while balancing challenges unique to their regional theaters. Fleet warfare will require the holistic, integrated application of distributed naval power across an entire fleet, working in concert with other fleets in other operational areas to confound, dislocate, and defeat our enemies. Campaigns must account for fleet warfare on a global scale, and form an integrated, coherent unity of purpose, effort, and effect across the naval, joint, and likely coalition force.

Fleet warfare in an era of GPC requires integrated and distributed multifleet operations on a global level.

### **U.S. Naval Operations, 1983**

*Instead of choke point barriers and convoys, the Soviets now faced offensive naval strike forces off all their major naval bases. Instead of scripted exercises and stale scenarios, the Soviets now faced imaginative new U.S. and allied operational concepts and tactics. And instead of a western naval posture centered on resupply of armies in Germany, the Soviets now had to face major concentrations of naval power in the Norwegian Sea, northern Norway, the eastern Mediterranean, and the Arctic and western Pacific Oceans—while America's allies expanded their own roles in protecting sea-lanes.*

John Lehman  
Oceans Ventured

## **KEY POINTS**

- The Navy executes five naval functions—sea control, power projection, deterrence, maritime security, sealift—to achieve and enable operational and strategic objectives.
- The Navy’s warfare areas—air warfare, air/missile defense, expeditionary warfare, information warfare, strike warfare, surface warfare, undersea warfare—are the means by which the Navy accomplishes those functions and achieves its operational objectives.
- Fleet warfare is the conflict between naval forces for freedom of action throughout the maritime domain. At its core, it is a competition for sea control.
- The Navy fights as part of a joint force that operates in all domains. Freedom of action in the maritime domain is the Navy’s greatest contribution to the joint team. This fight requires working with other Department of Defense and intelligence agencies who have a stake in our warfare areas.
- Consolidating warfighting at the fleet level enables the synthesis of new capabilities, C2, and tactics to maximize naval power at the tactical level. This does not elevate fighting to the OLW; rather it maximizes naval power necessary for victory at the TLW.
- Warfare against an enemy of resource and reach will require our Navy to operate as a globally unified force, orchestrating naval power in a manner that overcomes geographic, organizational, and administrative boundaries.
- The changing character of naval warfare requires the synthesis of naval power at the fleet level. Fleet warfare against a peer competitor requires integrated and distributed multifleet operations on a global level.

*Fleet Warfare*

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## II

# The Operational Level of Fleet Warfare

### LEVELS OF WARFARE

National strategic objectives are determined at the strategic level of warfare (SLW). The SLW is the level of warfare at which a nation determines national or multinational guidance, develops strategic objectives, then develops and commits national resources to achieve those objectives. The President of the United States, aided by the cabinet and national security team, and the Congress, set those objectives. Combatant commanders (CCDRs) work at the SLW as they directly support civilian leadership by identifying military end states and developing the theater strategy for their area of responsibility.

The OLW is the level of warfare in which campaigns and operations are planned, conducted, and sustained to achieve operational objectives to support achievement of strategic objectives. The OLW links the tactical employment of forces to national strategic objectives.<sup>13</sup> CCDRs lead military operations at the OLW, and Navy or joint force maritime component commanders (JFMCCs) support that work to determine operational objectives, develop campaign and operation plans (OPLANs) and determine the where, when, and purpose of major force deployments.

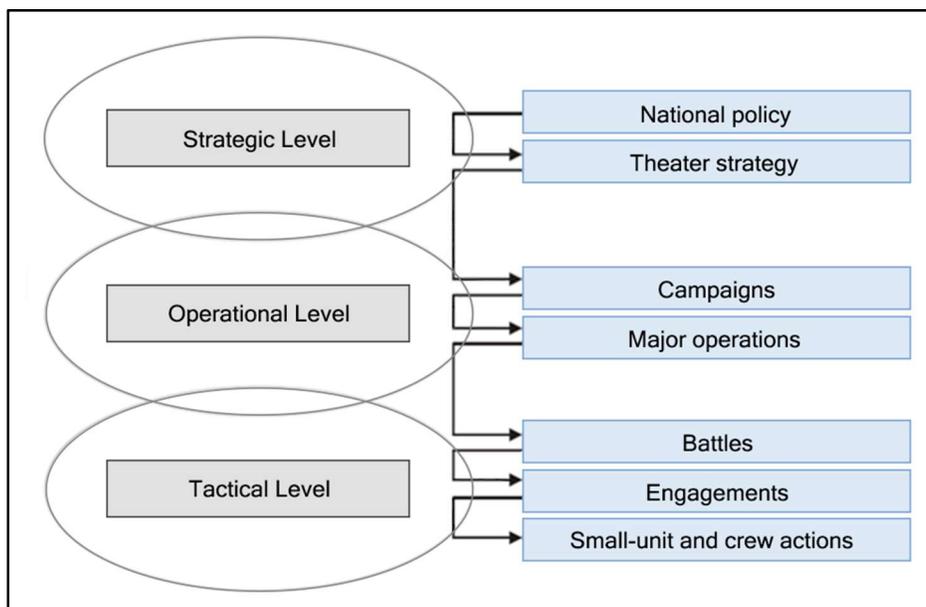
The TLW is the level of warfare at which forces plan and execute battles and engagements to achieve military objectives. Battles are always tactical, though their outcomes may have operational or strategic effects. NFCs work at the TLW as they execute theater strategy with assigned and available forces and engage the enemy in battle.<sup>14</sup> Figure 2-1 depicts the relationship between these conceptual arenas.

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<sup>13</sup> Doctrine historically identified strategy and logistics as the twin linkages between national policy and tactical action, but detailed study has broadened that perspective to focus the OLW on campaigning to achieve operational and strategic objectives.

<sup>14</sup> Several NFCs are dual-hatted as component commanders, and all could be assigned as a JFMCC. In these multirole situations, NFCs still work at the TLW to employ assigned forces and engage the enemy, and separately, in their component commander role, work at the OLW to develop and sustain campaigns and operations. Chapter IV provides additional discussion.

## *The Operational Level of Fleet Warfare*



**Figure 2-1. Levels of Warfare.** While the various forms and methods of warfare are ultimately expressed in concrete military action, the three levels of warfare—strategic, operational, and tactical—link tactical actions to achievement of national objectives. There are no finite limits or boundaries between these levels, but they help commanders design and synchronize operations, allocate resources, and assign tasks to the appropriate command. The strategic, operational, or tactical purpose of employment depends on the nature of the objective, mission, or task.

In naval warfare, levels of warfare are often compressed. The significant investment required to achieve capability at sea—in terms of money, manning, technology, and time—means that once a fleet is significantly degraded or lost, it is nearly impossible to recover in a strategically relevant time frame. Thus, the impacts of fleet action are often magnified into strategic level effects. History has many examples where tactical battle led to strategic results. The Battle of Trafalgar, where Admiral Horatio Nelson’s tactical victory saved Great Britain from the strategic peril of invasion from France, and the Battle of the Virginia Capes, where French victory prevented resupply of British troops in Yorktown, leading to American independence, are two such examples.

## *The Operational Level of Fleet Warfare*

The combat comprising the Battle of Midway was only a few hours long, yet the results of that battle changed the course of the war in the Pacific.<sup>15</sup> A case could be made that it also influenced the outcome in Europe, in that the enhanced political clout garnered by President Franklin D. Roosevelt from the victory aided the execution of a “Europe first” policy.

### **Campaigns and the OLW**

The principal tool used within the OLW to pursue the conditions that will achieve strategic objectives is the campaign. A campaign is a series of related operations, activities, and investments aimed at achieving operational and strategic objectives within a given time and space. A campaign plan is a joint OPLAN for a series of related major operations aimed at achieving strategic or operational objectives within a given time and space. When building and executing the military campaign/major OPLAN, commanders must ensure military actions are synchronized with those of other government and nongovernmental agencies and organizations, together with international partners, in order to achieve national strategic objectives.

Major operations are a series of tactical actions conducted by combat forces, coordinated in time and place, to achieve strategic or operational objectives in an operational area.

OLW activity to develop campaigns and operations is distinct from TLW activity required to win in combat. They align through a continuum of planning and merge at the point of battle, as the results of tactical engagement affect subsequent operational plans.

Winning in battle is the height of tactical excellence. Fighting the right battles is the height of operational excellence. Prevailing in fleet warfare requires both.

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<sup>15</sup> Fleet warfare is an infrequent event, as a result of typically slow evolution of the geostrategic environment and the enormous national investment required to develop viable fleet capability. Thus, fleet warfare between peer competitors occurs rarely, and the duration of its effects is measured in terms of years and decades. Though the Battle of Midway occurred over 75 years ago, it is among the most recent of fleet warfare examples upon which to draw.

**At the OLW, the focus is on campaigns to establish naval functional superiority that will have the greatest strategic effect.**

The naval campaigns of World War II were operational-level efforts to restore functional primacy in support of theater and strategic imperatives. In the Pacific, operational objectives entailed expanding our sea control to the point where we could directly project joint power onto the Japanese homeland weakened by a concurrent sea denial campaign against their economy. A two-pronged leapfrog advance of sea control and power projection along an axis of central Pacific Islands and the Southwest Pacific to the Philippines ultimately enabled direct power projection onto the Japanese mainland. Nationwide deprivation from destruction of the enemy's merchant shipping by U.S. submarines coupled with a bombing campaign originating from air bases captured from the sea brought about the end of the war in the Pacific, a strategic result made possible through multiyear operational campaigns to expand and exploit our sea control throughout the Pacific.

In the Atlantic, the operational objective entailed the establishment of sufficient sea control in order to deliver enough combat power to embark upon and sustain a land war in Europe (sea control in support of sealift in further support of joint power projection). A multifaceted campaign to include new tactics and technologies beat back the German submarine threat and enabled the delivery of forces and equipment to enable power projection across the European continent. Victory followed an inspiring and grueling land campaign to the gates of Berlin—a strategic victory that would not have been possible without the achievement of the operational objectives of sea control and sealift.

**OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK**

*Geography is the bones of strategy.*

Theodore Ropp  
War in the Modern World

For warfighting purposes, the primary value of the maritime domain stems from its utility as a maneuver space. Three factors fundamentally influence maneuver throughout the maritime domain, and accordingly shape tactics and strategy relevant to fleet warfare.

The first factor is geography. The coastlines of continents, the vastness of the oceans, climatic conditions, and key maritime terrain—choke points, harbors, islands, hydrographic features—constrain and define movement through the maritime domain.

## *The Operational Level of Fleet Warfare*

The second factor is sea lines of communication (SLOCs) that result from the vagaries of geography. SLOCs are direct routes across and among geographic and human-generated features enabling efficient and expeditious transit through the maritime environment.<sup>16</sup> SLOCs also refer in general terms to the ability to move goods, resources, or forces by any route through the maritime domain.

The third factor is the operational reach of the enemy. There are two traditional forms of reach, land-based and sea-based. Land-based capabilities (e.g., shore batteries, C2 jammers, missiles, aircraft) can influence the maneuverability of opponents out to a defined limit. Depending on the quality of their naval forces, enemy seaborne capabilities have no such limits, and can maneuver within the constraints of geography and the limits of a countereffort to prevent them. The evolution of space, cyberspace, and electromagnetic battlespace capabilities increasingly extend a third form of operational reach to a global scale in a manner distinct from land- and sea-based capabilities.

The overlays of geography, SLOCs, and reach create areas of greater or lesser military value, and therefore shade the maritime domain with areas of greater or lesser risk. Lines that bound combat on land have little parallel on the seas.

Thus, in fleet warfare, the geometry of risk is fluid, and unique to theater and circumstance. Risk may be envisioned as multidimensional, stemming from proximity of enemy engagement capabilities out to areas of relative safety and control, mindful of enemy maneuverability within various domains.<sup>17</sup> Between the two opponents' regions of relative safety and sea control lie contested multidomain areas that must be penetrated sufficiently to enable the achievement of operational and strategic objectives, while concurrently denying the enemy the ability to do the same.<sup>18</sup> It is within these contested areas that commanders fight to expand sea control and establish maritime superiority.

The prize is maneuverability that enables our freedom of action throughout the maritime domain; the degree of its attainment defines entire theaters of war.

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16 SLOC is a broader term that encompasses more than the strictly military purposes implied in the DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, which defines line of communication as "A route, either land, water, and/or air, that connects an operating military force with a base of operations and along which supplies and military forces move. Also called LOC." Within the context of the term "SLOC" in this publication also lie undersea cables, through which the bulk of digital data travels about the world.

17 Enemy ISRT capabilities enhance kill chain efficiency and constitute a second "overlay" of risk that shades the maritime domain.

18 "Sufficiently" as measured by the geography, time, spectrum, and/or cyberspace required to achieve desired operational or strategic objectives.

## OPERATIONAL CONCEPT

*Nothing about naval combat is understood if its two-sided nature is not grasped. Each side is simultaneously stalking the other.*

Wayne Hughes  
Fleet Tactics: Theory and Practice

Foremost among the Navy's functions is sea control, which enables all others. Sea control is established through prevailing in naval combat. Five processes, distilled from historic study, and first postulated by the naval tactician, Wayne Hughes, inform the conduct of naval combat:<sup>19</sup>

- Naval warfare centers on the process of attrition. Attrition comes from the successful delivery of firepower.
- Scouting—locating the enemy sufficiently to deliver effective firepower—is a crucial and integral process of tactics.<sup>20</sup>
- C2 is the process that transforms scouting and firepower potential into the reality of delivered force.
- Naval combat is a force-on-force process that often is accompanied by simultaneous attrition on both sides. To achieve victory, one must attack effectively first. Therefore, actions taken to interfere with the enemy's firepower, scouting, and C2 processes also are fundamentally important.<sup>21</sup>
- Maneuver also is a tactical process. Maneuver is the activity by which C2 positions forces to scout and shoot.

These rules are as valid in today's technologically enhanced era of fleet warfare as when Hughes first postulated them at the height of the Cold War. The difference now, however, is that the decisive effects once achieved only through the concentration of firepower from ship formations can now be replicated—and exceeded—by the integration of firepower and effects from widely distributed forces collectively able to maneuver across all domains.<sup>22</sup>

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19 Hughes, Wayne. *Fleet Tactics: Theory and Practice*, 1st edition, Naval Institute Press, 1986, pp. 145-146.

20 Hughes uses the term "scouting" to describe the current doctrinal acronym of ISRT.

21 Hughes uses a corollary to his famous maxim to explain the importance of information warfare: "The essence of information warfare is to interfere with the enemy's three fundamental processes—firepower delivery, scouting, and C2—and defend our own."

22 DOD Dictionary defines distribution as the arrangement of troops for any purpose, such as battle, march, or maneuver. Its usage is broadened here to mean the informed and deliberate separation of force in space and time.

Hughes' basic precept is that naval combat is a duel, and the side to attack effectively first generally wins. The means to generate decisive firepower in the past was to maneuver delivery platforms (i.e., ships) in tight formations to concentrate firepower and overwhelm specific targets.<sup>23</sup> Those tight ship formations are now replaced by the tight integration of capabilities across a variety of platforms, loosening the ties of geography, and organizational and administrative boundaries. The agility once displayed in close-quarters division tactics—"divtacs" of old—has been supplanted by the need to create similar agility in the orchestration of "sensing," "shooting," and countersensor/shooting capabilities across an entire fleet.

**At the OLW, the heart of the duel lies in orchestrating conditions of engagement**

*Hence we find the apparently simple doctrine of the battle was almost always entangled in two of the most difficult problems that beset our old admirals. The most thorny questions they had to ask were these. In the normal case of strength, it was not how to defeat the enemy, but how to bring him to action; and in the casual cases of temporary weakness, it was not how to sell your life dearly, but how to maintain the fleet actively on the defensive so as at once to deny the enemy the decision he sought and to prevent his attaining his ulterior motive.*

Julian Corbett  
Some Principles of Maritime Strategy

Hughes' precept is further applicable as warfare enters the information environment: the advantage goes to the side that moves first in fighting and winning a fully contested battlespace. To prevail in full-spectrum information warfare, we must embrace this "first mover advantage" as the foundation for our operations.

Hughes' other basic precept, that knowing the location of the enemy is of equal importance to being able to sink the enemy, has been affected by tremendous technological and tactical evolution as well. Integrating sensor capabilities with the same agility as the delivery of firepower is, as Hughes states, "crucial and integral" to success in the duel at the heart of fleet warfare.

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<sup>23</sup> Hughes' salvo equations indicate that twice as many shooters beats half as many equivalent shooters firing twice as fast.

*The Operational Level of Fleet Warfare*

Given the nature of combat, confounding enemy actions through interference of enemy firepower delivery, C2, or targeting, is of equal importance. Consider the value of World War II smoke generators that disrupted enemy targeting of our ships; these have now been replaced by technological capabilities across all warfare areas. These capabilities must be integrated into operational plans and tactical execution.

*War is based on deception. Move when it is advantageous and create changes in the situation by dispersal and concentration of forces.*

Sun Tzu  
The Art of War

Thus, the three legs of Hughes' tactical triad describing the "two-sided nature of naval combat" can be summarized as:

- Locating the target
- Delivering firepower against the target
- Confounding enemy abilities to do the same against us.

The processes of naval combat inform efforts to seize and maintain sea control or other naval functions required by theater and circumstance. To maximize opportunities in this technologically enhanced era of fleet warfare, the Navy's operational concept is to leverage integration, distribution, and maneuver to seize, maintain, and exploit freedom of action throughout the maritime domain.

**Theory and practice: cover and deception in fleet warfare**

**Theory:**

*Effective fusion of reconnaissance, surveillance, and intelligence information is so important that it must receive the same emphasis as the delivery of firepower. Contrarily, obstructing the enemy's scouting by cover, deception, confusion, or distraction merits enormous attention for successful scouting and screening are relative to each other.*

Wayne Hughes  
Fleet Tactics: Theory and Practice

**Practice: Norwegian Sea, August 1981**

*While the Soviet Northern Fleet Command knew that something big was up and had launched a special radar satellite specifically to track the NATO fleet, they had been caught flat-footed. The U.S. Navy had developed and practiced very sophisticated cover and deception tactics, and Lyons (VADM Ace Lyons, Commander Second Fleet/Commander, NATO Striking Fleet, Atlantic) had become a master in their use in large operations. Using classified electronic gear that simulated through emissions a large carrier force, he sent a small group of combatants heading southeast from Norfolk, while the main fleet proceeded north in total electronic silence and under the dense cloud cover normal in that season in those high latitudes. It wasn't until they were well into the Norwegian Sea that the Soviets realized they had been completely snookered. They had failed to detect an armada of eighty-three ships until it was within striking range of the Soviet Union itself.*

John Lehman  
Oceans Ventured

**CAMPAIGNS**

History suggests fleet warfare will likely require three distinct areas of campaigns: support of the joint strategic military objective; the achievement of maritime superiority; and the effort against an enemy's use of the seas.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Historically termed *guerre de course*, an effort against an enemy's use of the seas is an attritional campaign designed to erode an enemy's war-making capacity, undermine public support, and divert enemy naval capabilities. Julian Corbett elaborates in *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*: "The only right we or our enemy can have on the sea is the right of passage ... by denying the enemy this means of passage we check the movement of his national life at sea in the same kind of way that we check it on land by occupying his territory."

### *The Operational Level of Fleet Warfare*

The first two campaigns will commonly overlap; the third will likely be more independent. War in an era of GPC will require all three. War against nonpeer competitors may not.

Fleet warfare will be conducted within the context of a larger joint force fight in which our nation requires the military to achieve specific strategic objectives. The nature and location of the conflict will shape the Navy's contribution to the achievement of those objectives. Since 1945, the Navy has supported achievement of strategic military objectives primarily through the execution of four enduring naval functions: sealift, power projection, deterrence, and maritime security. The Navy has provided for the delivery of force and resource to theaters of ground operations, projected power to regions throughout the globe, conducted operations to deter adversaries across all levels of warfare, and conducted maritime security to restrict/limit support to opposing forces. Sea control has been a presumptive fact. Achievement of strategic military objectives has not been threatened by limitations imposed by a contest for sea control. However, in an era of GPC, support of strategic military objectives will almost invariably intertwine with our campaign to achieve maritime superiority.

The Navy has not had to fight for sea control since World War II, and has not had to be ready to fight for sea control since the Cold War. Nonetheless, without sea control, the joint force is crippled. Thus, readiness to prevail in fleet warfare is our fundamental duty to our nation, and to the joint force. Sea control may be achieved through destroying the enemy fleet, blockading them within a restricted area so that their reach cannot affect our freedom of action, depriving them of the means to inhibit our activity, or through the enemy's own choice based on what our fleet can do.

A campaign against an enemy's use of the sea is much broader than local efforts at sea denial. It is a separate, distinct effort aimed at the engine of an enemy's war-making ability. It will likely entail a variety of naval functions, to include especially sea control (in any of its various forms such as sea denial and blockading), but also power projection, deterrence, or maritime security. It is just as likely to require broader joint, interagency, and coalition support. A campaign against an enemy's use of the sea is an operational level effort aimed at its ability to wage war and is specifically designed to produce strategic results.

### *The Operational Level of Fleet Warfare*

Comparing and contrasting the first Gulf War (Operations DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM) with World War II illuminates these separate campaigns in differently scaled conflicts:

- 1) Joint strategic military objectives in both examples required sealift to support joint force power projection.<sup>25</sup>
- 2) Both contained elements of achieving maritime superiority, albeit on very different scales. In the first Gulf War, U.S. forces ceded sea control off the Kuwaiti coast in the months leading to combat. The nature of the conflict did not depend upon local sea control, and there was not significant overlap between the joint strategic military objective and the effort to regain local sea control. Thus, the effort to re-establish sea control was manifest mostly in a monthslong effort at clearing mines following the cessation of hostilities.<sup>26</sup> World War II's Battle of the Atlantic consisted of a much more robust campaign, primarily against the German submarine menace that threatened the supply of forces and resources to the European theater. The strategic military objective depended heavily on the success of the battle for sea control in the North Atlantic and could not be pursued until sufficient sea control was established and maintained for a long enough period to build up forces and supplies ashore.
- 3) Both wars also included campaigns designed to limit the enemy's use of the seas, through an internationally sanctioned blockade on Iraqi shipping during DESERT SHIELD, and through unrestricted warfare against Japanese shipping during World War II.

Platforms and capabilities applied to one campaign may be different or not available to support the others. Political and military objectives and strategic circumstance will determine the sequencing and balance of effort between the three campaigns inherent within fleet warfare.

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25 Military Sealift Command delivered more than 12 million tons of wheeled and tracked vehicles, helicopters, ammunition, dry cargo, fuel, and other supplies and equipment during the war. At the high point of the war, more than 230 government-owned and chartered ships were involved, delivering the largest part of the international arsenal that defeated Iraq.

26 The difficulties incurred as a result of ceding local sea control during the first Gulf War are discussed later in a vignette regarding alignment of naval and joint requirements.

## *The Operational Level of Fleet Warfare*

### **KEY POINTS**

- Winning in battle is the height of tactical excellence. Fighting the right battles is the height of operational excellence. Prevailing in fleet warfare requires both.
- The SLW is the level of warfare at which a nation determines national or multinational guidance, develops strategic objectives, then develops and commits national resources to achieve those objectives. The OLW focuses on campaigns and operations to achieve operational objectives to support achievement of strategic objectives. The TLW is the level of warfare at which forces plan and execute battles and engagements to achieve military objectives. Battles are always tactical, though their outcomes may have operational or strategic effects.
- At the OLW, commanders focus on naval functions that will have greatest strategic effect.
- The geometry of risk in fleet warfare is fluid and unique to theater and circumstance. Risk can be conceptualized as a multidimensioned continuum stemming from proximity of enemy engagement capabilities out to areas of relative safety and control, mindful of enemy maneuverability within various domains.
- Aligning firepower delivery, scouting, and C2 in a manner that will achieve tactical success is the crux of tactics. Aligning battles, engagements and small-unit and crew actions in a manner that will achieve strategic success is the crux of operations.
- Militarily, the primary value of the sea stems from its utility as a maneuver space. Three factors fundamentally influence maneuver throughout the maritime domain—geography, SLOCs, and enemy reach.
- The tactical formation of ships, so important to victory in the past, has evolved into tactical distribution of sensing and shooting capabilities that can fix targets and deliver massed effects from widely distributed geographic, domain, and spectral locations.
- The Navy's operational concept is to leverage integration, distribution, and maneuver to seize, retain, and exploit freedom of action throughout the maritime domain.

*The Operational Level of Fleet Warfare*

- Effective fusion of reconnaissance, surveillance and intelligence information is as important as the delivery of firepower. Obstructing the enemy by cover, deception, confusion, or distraction warrants similar attention.
- Multiple concurrent campaigns will likely be required in fleet warfare against a near-peer competitor: support of the joint strategic military objective; the achievement of maritime superiority; and the effort against an enemy's use of the seas.

*The Operational Level of Fleet Warfare*

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### III

## Operational Art and Design

### OPERATIONAL ART

*The Central Pacific offensive is an illuminating example of the benefits of prioritizing strategic, operational, and tactical goals appropriately. The main strategic objective, the defeat of Japan, was paramount. It was achieved by a sustained offensive through the Japanese defensive (maritime) perimeter. This offensive had two subsidiary goals, maintenance of a rapid operational tempo and defeat of the Japanese surface fleet.*

Trent Hone

U.S. Navy Surface Battle Doctrine and Victory in the Pacific

The purpose of operational art is the pursuit of strategic objectives through arrangement of tactical activity in time, space, and purpose. Though fleet warfare is fought at the TLW, it is won at the OLW.

Doctrine defines operational art as the cognitive approach used by commanders and staffs, supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgment, to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, and means while balancing risk. Commanders use operational art to determine when, where, for how long, and for what purpose naval forces will be employed. The objective of operational art is to optimize forces for success in combat while influencing the adversary's disposition before combat.

Joint doctrine provides much guidance and detail on operational art. Figure 3-1 outlines the integration of ends, ways, means, and risk in the application of operational art. Commanders and their staffs should use this framework to create their own processes to develop and execute strategy, campaigns, and operations. Figure 3-2 depicts the general objectives of the cognitive components of the operational art process across the operational and tactical levels of warfare.

Foremost, the ends of strategy must satisfy the political objectives determined by the President as the reason for waging war. Informed by the political objective(s), the role of fleet warfare must be determined in the context of the larger joint campaign in pursuit of strategic military objectives determined by the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) and theater strategic planning by CCDRs. This determination will inform the selection of enemy centers of gravity (COGs) on which to focus fleet operations.

*Operational Art and Design*

The interactive resources of capability, logistics, and command bound the limits of what is achievable. Finally, a realistic understanding of the enemy's true intentions, character, capabilities, and perceptions enables the crafting of fleet plans combining ends, ways, and means, while balancing risk.<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 3-1. A Conceptual Framework to Integrate Ends, Ways, Means, and Risk Within the Operational Art Process.** Operational art is the cognitive approach used by commanders and staffs, supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgment, to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, and means while balancing risks. The rest of this chapter provides more details on each category, some background, and their uses.

<sup>27</sup> See Navy Historical Foundation's Oral Interview Series, interview with VADM Henry Mustin, pp. 168-171, for a fascinating look into considerations involved in developing Second Fleet strategy in the 1980s, at: <https://www.navyhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Mustin-Oral-History.pdf>.

### **Political Objective**

*War is an instrument of policy. It must necessarily bear the character of policy and measure by its standards. The conduct of war, in its great outlines, is therefore policy itself, which takes up the sword in place of the pen but does not on that account cease to think according to its own laws.*

Carl Von Clausewitz  
On War

At the national level, war and conflict are designed to accomplish a political objective. This is what justifies strategic action and, as Clausewitz remarked, this is what determines a consequent conflict's form and character.<sup>28</sup> The political objective determines the strategic military objective, which in turn guides the military effort and shapes fleet warfare. Focus on the strategic military objective is the single most important element of campaign design.

Limited political objectives alter an enemy's use of its power (an example is the first Gulf War). Limited political objectives drive the use of military means to convince an enemy to make peace on our terms through an erosion of their leadership's will.<sup>29</sup> Limited political objectives typically result in negotiated settlements.

Unlimited political objectives alter the enemy's structure for exercising power—that is, military means support a national effort to overthrow enemy leadership or force its unconditional surrender (an example is World War II).<sup>30</sup>

Political objectives and consequent strategic military objectives will directly shape the conduct of fleet warfare. Commanders at all levels must have a shared understanding of strategic military objectives to enable decentralized execution and disciplined use of initiative inherent in mission command.<sup>31</sup>

### **Nature of the Joint Campaign**

Fleet warfare must be conceived, planned, and executed based on an understanding of the nature of the joint effort, which may be maritime or continental in character based on the threat and objectives. World War II provides examples of both types of campaigns.

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28 Till, Geoffrey. *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, Taylor & Francis, 2018. p. 58.

29 Naval doctrine calls this a strategy of erosion.

30 Naval doctrine calls this a strategy of annihilation.

31 Mission command is described here as the leadership approach in which the commander outlines desired objectives for subordinates to accomplish, and then relies on them to exercise disciplined initiative based on local situational awareness and lowered decision thresholds.

### *Operational Art and Design*

In the Pacific, the allies fought a peer naval power in a principally maritime theater. The naval campaign design involved incremental attacks across the Pacific, seizing island bases to support the fleet's advance. Once seized, key maritime terrain was used to control the surrounding seas. Local sea control was achieved to support power projection, which in turn supported a greater degree of sea control. Captured islands also provided bases that enabled strategic bombing, illustrating how the intertwined naval functions of sea control and power projection ultimately supported joint force power projection.

In the Atlantic, the allies fought a peer land power in a principally continental theater. The naval campaign design involved suppressing the enemy submarine threat sufficiently to move major ground and air forces into position for a cross-channel invasion of the continent supported by Navy power projection capabilities, and then keeping the sea lanes open to ensure the continuous flow of support for a long-duration land war. Sea control and Navy power projection were employed in support of subsequent joint (ground and air) power projection.

Fleet strategy must support the nature of the joint campaign. These examples illustrate the need for commanders to understand how sea power will support a joint campaign that is maritime in character versus a joint campaign that is continental in character, as well as inform the joint integration required to support maritime campaigns. Additionally, component commanders must be able to relate naval planning considerations to the JFC while subordinate commanders must understand how their tactical decision making aligns with the nature of the joint campaign.

### Alignment with joint campaign

Fleet warfare must align with the larger joint effort. The first Gulf War provides a good example. The CDR, Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, restricted allied naval operations (to include intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance efforts) from the waters north of the Kuwaiti-Saudi border in the months prior to the offensive phase of the Operation DESERT STORM. The joint force commander sought to minimize the risk of precipitating hostilities early through an unplanned or unnecessary maritime engagement. This decision to cede local sea control enabled a large Iraqi minelaying effort that subsequently restricted allied maritime freedom of action throughout the offensive phase of the brief war.<sup>32</sup>

The larger joint effort could accept the loss of sea control in the northern Arabian Gulf because the fleet could still provide sealift to deliver equipment and capabilities necessary for a ground offensive and blockade merchant shipping to reduce Iraq's economic support. Additionally, several carrier strike groups provided around-the-clock strike and air support following the commencement of combat operations. Nonetheless, mines disabled two U.S. warships, maritime freedom of action remained significantly curtailed, and sea control was not restored until the completion of an immense mine clearance effort months after hostilities concluded. Such were the trade-offs between purely maritime and greater joint objectives.

### Operational Centers of Gravity

*At every level of command, the proper selection of the objective is of greatest importance. Properly it should be one which supports the objective or mission of the next higher level.*

G.K. Carmichael

Principles of War and their Application to Strategy and Tactics, 1950

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32 Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf expounds: "Meanwhile, now that G-Day (the day ground combat was to begin) was upon us, I'd cancelled the Navy's amphibious assault on Faylakah Island. Plans called for it to precede the ground war by two days, but the helicopter carrier USS *Tripoli* and the Aegis guided missile cruiser USS *Princeton* had struck mines, U.S. and British minesweepers had been unable to clear the area, and as a result the Navy hadn't made it into position to launch the attack in time." Schwarzkopf, Norman. *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, Linda Grey/Bantam, 1992, p. 446. LCDR Rickson E. Evangelista provides additional insight in his Naval War College thesis, *Mine Warfare: Lessons Learned and Forgotten*: "The minimal importance placed on monitoring and countering the Iraqi mining activities demonstrated the coalition leadership's lack of understanding of the significant impact mine warfare could have at the operational level of war. COMUSNAVCENT repeatedly asked USCINCENT for permission to have aircraft fly farther north, but permission was denied for reasons discussed previously. Vice Admiral Stan Arthur tried to get permission to use helicopters to patrol the northern area of the Persian Gulf to get firm evidence of minelaying; General Schwarzkopf also denied permission to do that." Available at: <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a484287.pdf>.

## *Operational Art and Design*

A COG is the source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act. At the strategic level, COGs can include a leadership cadre, a military force, an alliance, national will or public support, a set of critical capabilities or functions, or national strategy itself. At the operational level, they are generally the principal sources of combat power, such as combat forces that are modern, mobile, or armored, that can ensure, or prevent, accomplishment of the mission.<sup>33</sup>

Fleet warfare provides an element of conceptual clarity in the determination of COGs. Sea control is the Navy's foremost objective at the operational level. Sea control enables all other naval functions, which in some combination are invariably required to achieve the strategic military objective necessary for overall strategic success. The principal operational COG is the enemy capability inhibiting our ability to establish or maintain sea control.

### **Identification of operational COG in the Battle of the Atlantic**

*Our strategy in the Atlantic involved maintaining our lines of communications to Great Britain and to future bases of operations against our enemies in Europe, in addition to insuring [sic] the security of the Western Hemisphere. The control of the Atlantic was being vigorously contested by German submarine and air forces ... To meet the situation we trained men and manned ships and aircraft as soon as we could in order to assume the offensive. By the end of 1942, we were ready and moved overseas in force with the Army.*

*By the spring of 1943, the war against German submarines in the Atlantic had turned in our favor and we were fully on the offensive in that area. Furthermore, we had built up to our strategic requirements for the transportation and support of our Army ground and air forces overseas and the reinforcement of British naval forces guarding against the outbreak of the German surface forces ... The German submarine fleet has been reduced from a menace to a problem.*

Fleet ADM Ernest King  
U.S. Navy at War, 1941–1945—Official Reports to the Secretary of the Navy,  
1 March 1944

In the example above, ultimate strategic victory (the unconditional surrender of Hitler's Germany) was enabled by the operational level success in reasserting sea control by a focused campaign against the enemy COG: "The German submarine fleet has been reduced from a menace to a problem."

Note that in fleet warfare, enemy COGs are those capabilities that inhibit our ability to execute naval functions, sea control as the fundamental requirement.

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<sup>33</sup> Echevarria, Antulio J. II. Clausewitz's Center of Gravity, *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 56: No. 1, Article 6, 2003.

Those COGs are likewise critical requirements necessary for the enemy to protect. The elements of an enemy's COG most vulnerable to our direct or indirect attack are an enemy's critical vulnerabilities. Mindful of the two-sided nature of fleet warfare, due consideration is required regarding own-force COGs and critical vulnerabilities.

Though conceptually similar to RADM Alfred Thayer Mahan's original ideas regarding the necessity for sea control, the technological advances of our time make it less likely that this condition will be obtained through a force-on-force battle of attrition, what RADM Mahan referred to as "decisive battle." Indeed, our operational concept of integration, distribution, and maneuver favors massing effects versus massing fleet assets to enable an accumulation of successful fleet outcomes. Recent history suggests that fleet warfare will be a protracted affair of episodic decisive engagement as each side seeks degrees of sea control suitable for supporting operational objectives. Nonetheless, freedom of action upon the seas remains an operational prerequisite to strategic success just as much today as it did when first proposed by RADM Mahan.

Strategy against an enemy's use of the seas requires analysis of our capabilities and the enemy's COGs to determine the best way to leverage naval combat power against an opponent's benefit from the sea. Enemy COGs in this effort will be those means by which the enemy gains strength for their war-making effort through use of the seas and will likely entail a campaign using the sea control tactics of blockade and sea denial, maritime security, as well as a host of interagency, joint, and coalition capabilities and support.

### **Fleet Warfare Resources**

The architecture of naval warfare identifies warfighting excellence at the TLW as the means to achieve and maintain naval functions leading to maritime superiority at the OLW. Though warfighting excellence is the prima facie requirement of the architecture, our warfare capabilities obviously require sustainment and direction. Thus, at its most conceptual level, fleet warfare is comprised of capabilities used to wage war, logistics used to sustain war, and command used to direct war. These bound the development and execution of achievable fleet strategy at the OLW.

### ***Capabilities***

Commanders already understand the capabilities of the naval arsenals at their disposal. The intent of this section is to highlight for consideration additional capabilities that may be available in the pursuit of operational objectives.

### 38th Commandant's Planning Guidance

*We are a naval expeditionary force capable of deterring malign behavior and, when necessary, fighting inside our adversary's weapons-engagement-zone to facilitate sea denial in support of fleet operation and joint force horizontal escalation. Nothing could be more relevant to the National Defense Strategy and the certainty of an uncertain future than this. We are not a second land army, nor do we aspire to be anything other than the world's premier naval expeditionary force.*

Gen. David Berger, Commandant of the Marine Corps

Future fleet warfare will increasingly rely on capabilities not necessarily under direct fleet command. For example, special operations forces, embarked on fleet vessels, could be used to enhance targeting, communications, and other capabilities. Capabilities can also include those inherent within other fleets, or resident within naval forces already in theater. Joint forces, now including space and cyberspace, all have capabilities that can support fleet warfare. Additionally, national capabilities are increasingly responsive and pervasive as technological advances expand across the maritime domain. Furthermore, integrated campaigning below the level of armed conflict provides opportunities in peace to find and refine efficiencies that are practical in war.

We fight alongside coalition partners, and we integrate capabilities bound by common purpose if not common command authorities. Our capabilities are strongest when they support, and are supported by, coordination, synchronization, and execution with allies and partners. Information sharing, collaborative planning, maritime engagements, and naval exercises with allies and partners all deepen and expand our collective operational and combat capability. Wartime tactical excellence is founded upon practiced proficiency with our allies and partners.

*Operating and exercising together with allies and partners, our fleet commanders will focus on full interoperability at the high end of naval warfare. We will build on existing maritime intelligence and logistics partnerships with allied nations and expand relationships with partner nations to broaden and strengthen global maritime awareness and access.<sup>34</sup>*

ADM Michael Gilday, CNO

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<sup>34</sup> CNO FRAGO 01/2019, Dec 2019, Warfighting, p. 4.

Commanders and staffs must invest in upfront research, collaboration, staff processes, and exercises across multiple organizations to ensure that additional capabilities across all domains can be integrated in a tactically relevant manner within the speed of a naval fight.

***Logistics***

*Logistics provides the physical means for organized forces to exercise power. In military terms, it is the creation and sustained support of combat forces and weapons. Its objective is maximum sustained combat effectiveness.*

RADM Henry E. Eccles  
Logistics in the National Defense

Operational-level logistics connects strategic-level logistics resources with the tactical user, thus enabling effective logistics support across the range of military operations. Simply put, if you don't have the means, you don't have a strategy.

Operations and logistics must be fully integrated. Campaign planning and logistical planning are inseparable; military history is replete with spectacular examples, both good and bad, of the intertwined nature of strategy and logistics. Logistics planning is an organic component of the Navy planning process. It is imperative that logistics factors be a pre-eminent input in campaign planning.

The war theorist RADM Henry E. Eccles postulated four fundamentals of fleet logistics while capturing lessons from World War II at the Naval War College: "Fundamentally, every basic theater logistics plan is built on four considerations. First, the characteristics of the theater, its geography, topography, and hydrography, its relative distances and its distance from the continental U.S. Next, we have the forces involved, then the nature of the operations contemplated and finally, the requirements for mutual or inter-theater support."<sup>35</sup>

As often as the side that acts bolder, or adapts faster, wins, military history also demonstrates that the side that makes more errors, or more egregious ones, just as often loses. This is a particular warning considering the number of examples of an overstretched supply chain dooming a military endeavor.

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35 Eccles, Henry E. Theatre Logistic Planning, Naval War College Review, Vol. 3: No. 8, Article 2, 1950.

**PRC perspective: a lesson learned from the Falklands War<sup>36</sup>**

*The Chinese have observed that Argentina's defeat in the Falklands/Malvinas conflict can, in addition to the factors noted above, be explained by its military following poor tactical guidelines. "[T]he Argentinean military philosophy was passive, its tactics inflexible, and furthermore lacked real effective aircraft to attack the British defensive capabilities and, still further, to attack Britain's most important, yet most vulnerable supply shipping; this was Argentina's greatest mistake."<sup>37</sup> This failure to observe Great Britain's glaring weakness in the length of its logistical supply line is a particularly egregious fault of the Argentinean military. "From the perspective of the history of warfare, to not attack a very long and yet very vulnerable supply line, is extremely short-sighted."<sup>38</sup> ... According to PLA assumptions, the most critical center of gravity is a support system located in an opponent's forward deployed and rear bases, which could not be defended against every attack in every place and at every conceivable time. Today, the military heavily depends on its logistics support system, so that the system itself becomes bloated, extremely visible and vulnerable.<sup>39</sup>*

Christopher Yung

**Command**

Mission command is a critical resource in the execution of fleet warfare. Though it is common to think of command in terms of an activity, it is worthwhile, when considering the scale and consequence of fleet warfare, to consider for a moment the idea of command as a resource. The quality of our command will determine outcomes as surely as the exquisiteness of our capabilities and the reliability of our logistics.

Fleet warfare against a peer competitor will require multifleet operations that create and synchronize global effects. Creating unity of effort in a globally distributed but integrated environment relies on decentralized C2. Each commander must recognize local conditions and align their actions in a manner that will best contribute to the achievement of broader operational and strategic objectives. Thus, fleet warfare relies as much on the intellectual integration of

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36 Yung, Christopher D. Chinese Lessons from Other Peoples' Wars, Sinica Rules the Waves? The People's Liberation Army Navy's Power Projection and Anti-Access/Area Denial Lessons from the Falklands/Malvinas Conflict, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2011, p. 83.

37 Yung cites Zhou Ming, Argentina, England Malvinas Islands Conflict (The Malvinas Problem), available from news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2007-03/28/content\_5906424\_2.htm.

38 Yung cites Zhou Ming, Argentina, England Malvinas Islands Conflict (The Malvinas Problem), available from news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2007-03/28/content\_5906424\_2.htm.

39 Yung cites Jianxiang Bi. Joint Operations: Developing a New Paradigm, James Mulvenon and David Finkelstein, eds., China's Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, jointly published by Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, and Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 2003, p. 64.

commanders as it does the technical integration of their platform's capabilities. Mission command harnesses the power of that integration to create unity of effort towards common objectives across a distributed force.

Clear commander's intent, shared understanding of objectives, and individual trust and confidence among commanders at all levels enhance the quality of mission command. Development and inculcation of mission command is an investment in warfighting.

*The human element is a combination of instincts plus intelligence. The military virtues necessary for success are made instinctive by training. The commander strives for unity of effort, which implies leadership, training, loyalty, and initiative; for continuity of effort, which calls for decision of character, perseverance, and fortitude; and for vision, which implies knowledge of war, skill, and judgment. The commander combines and coordinates the various military virtues into a strong, well-balanced whole.*

Fleet ADM Ernest King  
War Instructions, 1944

### **Concept of the Enemy**

*... the science of strategy consists, in the first place in knowing how to choose well a theater of war and to estimate correctly ... the enemy.<sup>40</sup>*

Antoine-Henri Jomini  
The Art of War

No strategy will be successful that does not include careful consideration of enemy capabilities, disposition, and intent. The wartime commander needs to properly assess the factors of space, time, and force from the enemy's perspective. In general, the larger the scale of the objective to be accomplished, the more complex these factors are and the more difficult it is to assess them properly.<sup>41</sup>

The intelligence staff must provide an understanding of the operational environment (OE), particularly with regard to the enemy's forces, capabilities, and intentions. Due regard must be given to the tension between the factors of

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40 Jomini, Antoine Henri. *The Art of War*, Greenhill Books, 1992, p. 299.

41 Vego, Milan. *Major Naval Operations*, Newport Paper Thirty-two, Center for Naval Warfare Studies, Naval War College Press, 2008, p. 64.

## *Operational Art and Design*

enemy capability and enemy intentions. The most important advantage of relying on the enemy's capabilities is that the commander and his staff would cover the full spectrum of what the enemy can physically do in a given situation; hence, the risk of being surprised by some overlooked enemy capability is relatively low.<sup>42</sup> Equipped with an understanding of what the enemy is capable of doing, planning can then focus on identifying and addressing the enemy's most likely and most dangerous courses of action (COAs) rather than dissipating resources by trying to address every possibility.

Intelligence at the OLW focuses on theater-level requirements such as supporting the planning and conduct of campaigns; monitoring events; determining the location, capabilities, limitations, and intentions of enemy forces in theater; and identifying adversary COGs. Deep understanding of the enemy facilitates identification and evaluation of potential enemy COAs and the nominations of targets when required. Intelligence attempts to reduce uncertainty, the Clausewitzian "fog and friction" of war, by providing accurate, relevant, and timely knowledge about the adversary and the operational environment. Ultimately, intelligence seeks to provide advantage in the never-ending risk-reward calculation intrinsic to warfare.

Intelligence plays a critical role in assisting commanders' decision making across the range of military operations. Commanders use intelligence to anticipate, visualize, and understand the OE to influence the outcome of operations, focus combat power, and provide force protection as needed. Intelligence can also provide a Red Team, to challenge plans to help avoid group think and to improve effectiveness.<sup>43</sup>

### **Assumptions**

An assumption is a specific supposition of the operational environment that is assumed to be true, in the absence of positive proof, essential for the continuation of planning. Assumptions are a necessary part of operational art, and VADM Henry Mustin's famous maxim to his commanders and staff captured in his 1986 Fighting Instructions bears repeating and consideration here: *"If you ever make an assumption about the enemy that makes your problem easier, you'd better damned well challenge that assumption repeatedly."*<sup>44</sup>

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42 Vego, Milan. Major Naval Operations, Newport Paper Thirty-two, Center for Naval Warfare Studies, Naval War College Press, 2008, p. 64.

43 This effort is often confused with a red cell, which also includes intelligence personnel and is used to support exercises by emulating the enemy threat.

44 Mustin, Henry VADM. CSFL/C2F/CJTF 120 Fighting Instructions, Annex D, 21 May 1986.

### **Calculated Risk**

Commanders assess risk using their calculated and intuitive grasp of the probability and consequences of harm to force or mission based on the outcomes resulting from their decisions.

Risk has two sources: threats and hazards. Threats originate from foes, those with the capability and intent to cause us harm. Hazards originate from conditions (e.g., weather, terrain, equipment status). Threats are the focus of risk calculus in naval warfare.

Risk to force and risk to mission are fundamental considerations in every endeavor. Knowledge of own-force capabilities and a clear understanding of objectives is necessary to determine the balance between the two. Risk assessment requires a thorough understanding of enemy capabilities and a seasoned estimate of enemy intentions.

Senior commanders have the added responsibility of conveying decision-quality risk guidance to subordinate commanders to guide their initiative. Common understanding of risk throughout all levels of warfare informs decisive action and enables bold execution by leaders who understand commander's intent and are willing to close with and defeat the enemy when they glimpse opportunities in the risk-reward calculus.

*Calculating risks does not mean taking a gamble. It is more than figuring the odds. It is not reducible to a formula. It is the analysis of all factors which collectively indicate whether or not the consequences to ourselves will be more than compensated for by the damage to the enemy or interference with its plans. Correct calculation of risks, by orderly reasoning, is the responsibility of every naval officer who participates in combat, and many who do not.*

Fleet ADM Ernest King  
Report to Secretary of the Navy, 1944

## **OPERATIONAL DESIGN**

Operational art encompasses operational design—the conception and construction of the framework that underpins a joint operation or campaign plan and its subsequent execution. Together, operational art and operational design strengthen the relationship between strategic objectives and the tactics employed to achieve them. Joint doctrine

## *Operational Art and Design*

lists 13 elements that comprise operational design.<sup>45</sup> The following considerations do not replace or supplant the joint doctrinal elements but provide a broader framework for commanders and their staffs to help inform a comprehensive strategy suitable “for the kind of war on which they are embarking.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Enemy Capability and Enemy Will**

War is a clash of wills exercised through a contest of military capability. At the outset of war, all warring factions contain two reservoirs: the first of these, their capability to wage war; the second, their will to do so. They are discrete elements, though mutually sympathetic to changes in the other. Both require constant assessment, both within the scope of fleet warfare, and in coordination within the larger joint campaign.

As previously discussed, fleet strategy against military capability requires multiple operational efforts, in support of the strategic military objective, against an enemy’s ability to contest our sea power, and against an enemy’s economic ability to support their war-making efforts through their use of the seas.

Because the seat of power is upon the land, fleet warfare will likely contribute synergistic effects to the joint, and likely combined, fight against an enemy’s reservoir of will. Nonetheless, the development, support, and execution of these campaigns ought to give due regard to the Clausewitzian distinctions between the will of the leadership of the nation waging war; the military of the nation waging war; and the population of the nation waging war.

#### **The results of the Tet offensive, 1968**

*So that what in fact was a humiliating military defeat for the North Vietnamese ended up to be a diplomatic victory of the highest order. You’ve heard the famous story, which is true, of the two colonels meeting during the peace talks in Paris. The U.S. colonel says to the Vietnamese colonel: “Well, we’re negotiating for peace, but I want you to know that you never defeated us on the battlefield.” The Vietnamese colonel says, “That’s true; and it’s also irrelevant.”<sup>47</sup>*

VADM Henry Mustin

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45 JP 5-0 lists the following 13 elements of operational design: objective, military end state, COG, effects, culmination, lines of operation/lines of effort, decisive points, direct and indirect approach, operational reach, arranging operations, anticipation, forces, force employment mechanisms.

46 Clausewitz, *On War*: “The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.”

47 Mustin, Henry VADM. Navy Historical Foundation’s Oral Interview Series, p. 71.

### **Annihilation and Erosion Strategies**

Strategies against enemy capability are strategies of annihilation. Strategies against enemy will are strategies of erosion.

Strategies of annihilation are predominantly military in nature, with other instruments of national power in support. The focus of military effort is the elimination of an enemy's military capability such that the enemy is unable to resist. This is the goal of fleet warfare when sea control is in dispute.

Strategies of erosion require tactical engagement to degrade some degree of enemy capability, though they may equally rely on integrated efforts across all elements of national power. The focus is to raise the costs of waging war higher than the enemy is willing to pay.

### **Sequential and Cumulative Campaigns**

Furthermore, strategy usually takes one of two forms: sequential campaigns that require a sequence of events in time, space, or purpose to build towards a desired strategic effect, and cumulative campaigns that require an accumulation of discrete events, which cumulatively create a desired strategic effect.

These forms are not mutually exclusive. They can be used concurrently to great effect, as demonstrated by the allied campaigns in the Pacific during World War II. The allies used a sequential campaign to extend their span of sea control across south and central Pacific towards the Japanese mainland, while waging a concurrent cumulative campaign against Japan's economy through unrestricted submarine warfare.

#### **Distinguishing between campaigns in the Pacific in World War II**

*So that in the Pacific from 1941 to 1945, actually we conducted two separate wars against Japan. We conducted the sequential strategy campaigns, our drives across the Pacific to the coast of Asia and up to the shores of the Empire. And apparently, quite apart from that we conducted a cumulative strategy aimed at Japan's economy. Oddly enough, these two went along together in time but essentially independent in their day-to-day activity.<sup>48</sup>*

RADM J.C. Wylie  
Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control

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48 Wylie, RADM J.C. Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control, Rutgers University Press, 1967, p. 118.

### **Direct and Indirect Approaches**

Joint doctrine describes a direct approach as one which attacks the enemy's COG or principal strength by applying combat power directly against it and an indirect approach as one which attacks the enemy's COG by applying combat power against critical vulnerabilities that lead to the defeat of the COG while avoiding enemy strength.

Wylie's observation regarding the Pacific campaigns above exemplifies the intertwined nature of these two approaches at the OLV in the maritime domain. The U.S. and allied sweep of sea control across the Pacific could be said to have been a direct approach to achieving our strategic objectives, while the campaign against enemy shipping was an indirect method of achieving strategic objectives. The sequential expansion of sea control was an attempt to ultimately compel Japan to surrender through the delivery of overwhelming force to the mainland, while the antishipping campaign was a cumulative effort to get Japan to succumb to surrender through the starvation of war making and economic supplies. The first was aimed at the military capability of Japan, and the other aimed at incapacitating the capability of Japan to continue. They were used concurrently with synergistic effect.<sup>49</sup>

Though B.H. Liddell Hart is perhaps the most famous advocate of the indirect approach, he acknowledges intellectual lineage to Sun Tzu. "On reading the book (Sun Tzu's "The Art of War") I found many other points that coincided with my own lines of thought, especially his constant emphasis on doing the unexpected and pursuing the indirect approach. It helped me realize the agelessness of the more fundamental military ideas, even of a tactical nature." he writes in his Foreword to Samuel Griffith's Oxford dissertation translation.

#### **Normal and extraordinary forces and direct and indirect approaches**

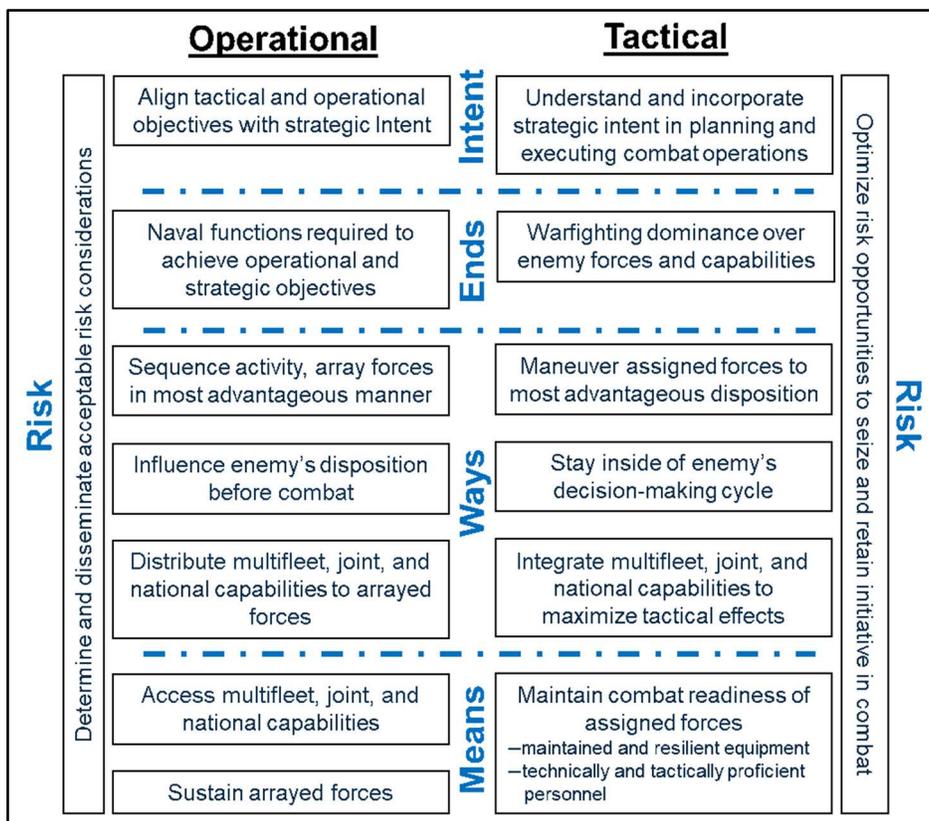
*"In battle there are only the normal and extraordinary forces, but their combinations are limitless; none can comprehend them all. For these two forces are mutually reproductive; their interaction as endless as that of interlocking rings. Who can determine where one ends and the other begins?"*

Sun Tzu  
The Art of War

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<sup>49</sup> Certainly, within these broad OLV campaigns are contained many smaller-scale examples of direct and indirect approaches at the TLW using unexpected, unanticipated and indirect methods to obtain specific objectives.

In summary, operational design enhances understanding of the larger situation and provides a framework upon which to develop strategies, campaigns, or operations. The commander must consider the balance of effort against an enemy's will and capability, the appropriate application of annihilation or erosion strategies, the sequential or cumulative nature of campaigns, and direct or indirect approaches to achieve objectives.



**Figure 3-2. Objectives Within Operational Art: Integrating Intent, Ends, Ways, Means, Risk.** The general objectives of the cognitive components of the operational art process across the operational and tactical levels of warfare are depicted. At the OLOW, the objective of risk integration is to determine and disseminate acceptable risk considerations to tactical commanders, whereas at the TLW, the objective is to optimize risk opportunities to seize and retain initiative in combat.

## **KEY POINTS**

- Fleet warfare is fought at the TLW, but it is won at the OLW.
- The commander working at the OLW has no higher purpose than the development and execution of successful campaigns to defeat our nation's enemies and secure control of the seas. The intent, ends, ways, means, and risk conceptual framework aids consistency in strategy development.
- Political objectives and consequent strategic military objectives will directly shape the nature of fleet warfare.
- Fleet warfare must be conceived, planned, and executed based on an understanding of the nature of the joint campaign, which may be maritime or continental.
- Capabilities include those of joint and allied forces as well as organic fleet capabilities.
- The foremost operational COG is the enemy capability inhibiting our ability to establish or maintain sea control.
- At its most conceptual level, fleet warfare is comprised of capabilities used to wage war, logistics used to sustain war, and command used to direct war. These bound the development and execution of achievable fleet strategy at the operational level of warfare.
- No strategy will be successful that does not include careful consideration of enemy capabilities, disposition, and intent.
- Calculated risk is the analysis of all factors, which collectively indicate whether the consequences to us will be more than compensated by the damage to the enemy or interference with their plans.

## IV

# Organization, Command and Control, and Fleet Warfare

### ORGANIZATION

#### **Component Commands, Numbered Fleets, and the Operational Level of Warfare**

The component commander, whether in an NCC or JFMCC capacity, aligns tactical activity in pursuit of operational objectives to achieve the military objectives of the CCDR. The NFC, as the Navy's highest tactical echelon, executes the tactical activity within the assigned fleet. Figure 4-1 details roles and responsibilities for NCCs and NFCs within the joint force.

Some NCCs command one or more NFCs while some NCCs are dual-hatted as NFCs. In these dual-hat circumstances, NFCs still work at the TLW to employ assigned forces and engage the enemy, and separately, in their component commander role, work at the OLW to develop and sustain campaigns and operations.

Unlike crisis or contingency operations, which are historically hard to predict, geopolitical movements that could lead to peer/near-peer warfare and attendant fleet warfare are unmistakable. Joint doctrine provides a clear C2 structure to be used in such circumstances. Fleet warfare will be conducted under the auspices of a JFMCC who reports to a CCDR or JFC. War games can inform appropriate JFMCC assignments for various fleet warfare scenarios and enhance a common understanding of the execution of multifleet operations required of an endeavor of such scale and consequence.

Fleet warfare in this GPC era will require global coordination that crosses traditional CCDR boundaries. The supported CCDR's JFMCC will integrate naval activity across CCDR lines under the authorities of a support command relationship. The SECDEF establishes and prioritizes support between and among CCDRs via the support command relationship. When a supporting commander cannot fulfill the needs of the supported commander, the SECDEF will be notified by either commander and will rely on the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Services to determine solutions.

*Organization, Command and Control, and Fleet Warfare*

| <u>Level of Warfare</u> | <u>Role</u>  | <u>Action</u>   | <u>Responsibilities</u>  |
|-------------------------|--|---|--|
| <b>Strategic</b>        | <b>President</b>                                   | Determines  | Policy<br>National strategic objectives  |
|                         | <b>SECDEF</b>                                      | Translates policy and national security objectives into | Strategic military objectives  |
|                         | <b>Combatant Commanders</b>                        | Identifies<br>Develops                                  | Military end state<br>CCDR theater strategy                                    |
| -----                   |  |   |  |
| <b>Operational</b>      | <b>JFCs and Component Commanders</b>               | Establishes   | Operational objectives to achieve military end states and strategic objectives |
|                         |  | Determines  | Where, when, and purpose of major force deployment                             |
| -----                   |  |   |  |
| <b>Tactical</b>         | <b>Joint TF Commanders and Tactical Commanders</b> | Plans and executes                                      | Battles and engagements to achieve assigned military objectives                |

**Figure 4-1. Navy Component and Numbered Fleet Commander Roles and Responsibilities Within the Joint Force.** The Armed Forces of the United States conduct military operations as a joint force. Navy component commanders (NCCs), in concert with the CCDR’s theater strategy and desired military end states, establish operational objectives and determine Navy major force deployment. NFCs, as the highest tactical echelon, plan and execute battles and engagements. Of note, several NFCs are currently dual-hatted as component commanders, and all could be designated as JFMCCs.

**Level of warfare is tied to the objective of activity, not to echelon of command.**

Actions within the three levels of warfare are not associated with a particular command level, unit size, equipment type, or force or component type. Instead, actions are defined as strategic, operational, or tactical based on their impact or contribution to achieving strategic, operational, or tactical objectives. For example, Fleet ADM Chester Nimitz functioned among all three levels of warfare in World War II. When discussing grand strategy with President Roosevelt, he was working at the SLW. When planning the campaign to advance sea control and power projection through the Marianas Islands with ADM Raymond Spruance, he was working at the OLW. When he ordered VADM Frank Fletcher to station his carriers to the northeast of Midway to avoid detection on the eve of battle in June 1942, he was working at the TLW.

**Notional Naval Operational Chain of Command**

The operational chain of command begins with the President, and continues through the SECDEF, to CCDRs, who are responsible for executing military missions. These CCDRs exercise command authority over assigned forces via Service component commanders. The NCC and the Marine Corps component commander are peers, who both report to the CCDR. In some cases, a Marine Corps component commander may also serve as a commanding general, Fleet Marine Force subordinate to a fleet commander.

**Current Navy Fleet Operational Chains of Command**

The Navy's current fleet organization includes naval component commands, numbered fleets, and consolidated component/numbered fleet headquarters to meet the demands of specific regions. The Navy's traditional and doctrinal warfighting configuration is the fleet, commanded by an NFC. A numbered fleet is the Navy's highest tactical echelon and comprises various TFs, TGs, TUs, and TEs for the purpose of prosecuting specific naval operations. Figure 4-2 depicts the current Navy fleet operational chain of command.

*"In the U.S. system, it [a Navy fleet] is another maneuver arm for the naval component. I don't really own battlespace per se, as I own mission. If I'm given a mission, in the Arctic, or the North Atlantic or Western Atlantic or Southern Atlantic, I address that mission."<sup>50</sup>*

VADM Andrew Lewis, Commander, United States Second Fleet, 2020

50 Lewis, Andrew VADM. 05 August 2020, Available at: <https://seapowermagazine.org/admiral-cool-to-notion-of-separate-arctic-fleet/>.

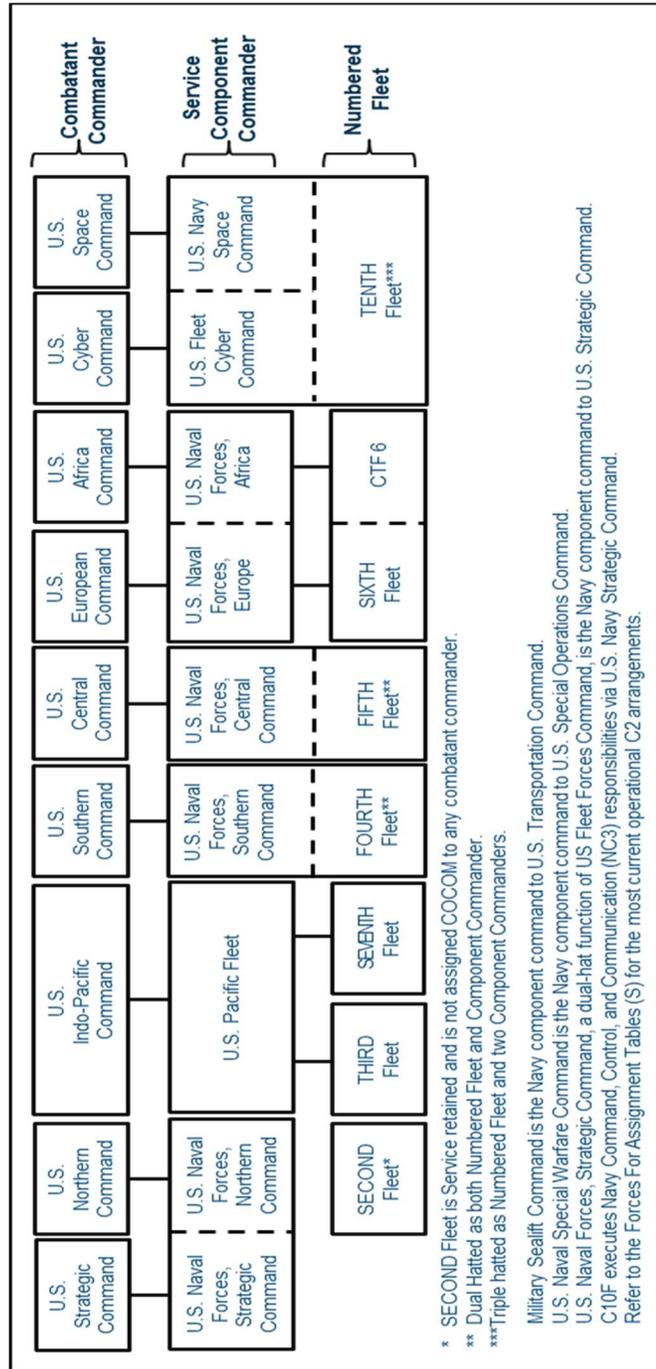


Figure 4-2. Current Navy Fleet Operational Chains of Command

## COMMAND AND CONTROL

Successful C2 coordinates intelligence, maneuver, and fires to detect and attack an enemy before it can detect and attack us. Thus, C2 is the art of leading people and managing information through a faster, more effective operational cycle than the enemy while dealing with constrained time and unconstrained uncertainty. It is an integral part of the sensor-shooter fight critical to tactical success in fleet warfare. C2 aligns tactical commanders and guides their activity towards operational and strategic objectives.

The defining C2 challenge facing military commanders has always been directing activity in an uncertain and changing environment. In his study of command in war spanning 25 centuries, the military theorist Martin Van Creveld concludes that the decisive feature of command structure is determined by the treatment of uncertainty. Confronted with a task, and having less information available than is needed (an inherent and enduring feature of warfare) there are two choices: increase the information processing capability of the organization, and design the organization to enable it to operate on less information.<sup>51</sup>

The Navy's historic experience with mission command is a classic example of the latter, though that legacy does not obviate the need, or value of, increasingly capable information processing capabilities.

Historic patterns of war suggest that periodic trends that rely on centralization inevitably fall short against the realities of globally dispersed operations, equipment malfunction, deliberate deception operations, and of course, the fog and friction of war. Furthermore, the increasing speed, automation, and reach that are changing the character of fleet warfare will likely exacerbate deficiencies in C2 constructs.<sup>52</sup> Commanders must determine command arrangements to best employ forces and integrate new or emergent technologies given inherent capabilities and expected threats of the time.

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51 Van Creveld, Martin. *Command in War*, Harvard University Press, 1985, pp. 269-270.

52 The Navy's current composite warfare commander command structure is a nuanced form of mission command termed "command by negation." Developed during the Cold War to manage the complexity of battle against a peer naval power, it distributes C2 among commanders to decentralize warfighting activities, while providing the overall tactical commander the ability to deny authority to any intended action signaled by a subordinate. Its efficacy in fleet warfare on a global scale has yet to be tested.

*Organization, Command and Control, and Fleet Warfare*

*The fact that, historically speaking, those armies have been most successful which did not turn their troops into automatons, did not attempt to control everything from the top, and allowed subordinate commanders considerable latitude has been abundantly demonstrated. The Roman centurions and military tribunes; Napoleon's marshals; Moltke's army commanders; Ludendorff's storm detachments; Gavish's divisional commanders in 1967—all these are examples, each within its own stage of technological development, of the way things were done in some of the most successful military forces ever.*

- *the realization that certainty is the product of time as well as of information, and the consequent willingness to do with less of the latter in order to save the former;*
- *the postulation by higher headquarters of minimum, rather than maximum, objectives;*
- *the freedom granted junior commanders to select their own way to the objective in accordance with the situation on the spot, thus cutting down on the amount of data processing required;*
- *and the willingness of superior headquarters to refrain from ordering about their subordinates' subordinates*

*all these are indispensable elements of what the Germans call Auftragstaktik, or mission-oriented command system.*

*It is not enough, however, simply to allow subordinate commanders wide latitude and then demand that they fill it with their initiative; to do so they must first be properly trained and then be provided with the right organizational means.<sup>53</sup>*

Martin Van Creveld  
Command in War

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<sup>53</sup> Van Creveld, Martin. *Command in War*, pp. 270-1. Creveld continues, "In any large organization, the virtues of formal communications systems—standardization, brevity, and precision—cannot be denied; those very virtues, however, also make such systems more subject to interruption and less flexible as a vehicle for original ideas ... It must be guarded against by a design that deliberately leaves room for face-to-face [person-to-person], unstructured interaction among people who know each other well enough in order not to limit their exchanges entirely to the line of business."

## *Organization, Command and Control, and Fleet Warfare*

Command arrangements include force task organization, tasks assigned to formations, areas of responsibility, and command relationships among commanders. As we will almost invariably fight alongside allies and partners, combined force interoperability and/or integration is also a force-multiplying consideration.

There are four command relationships: combatant command (command authority), operational control, tactical control, and support. Commanders are responsible for ensuring that relationships among subordinate commanders are clearly delineated and understood. Additionally, for the support relationship, it is the commander's responsibility to ensure subordinate commanders explicitly understand the degree of authority and support both to be provided and received.

Commanders must also exercise sound judgment regarding decentralization, balancing three primary approaches to C2 depending on mission and circumstance. The first is command by direction, in which the commander observes the battlespace from a vantage point and then personally directs forces against the enemy. The second is command by planning, in which the commander tries to plan every move in advance, relying on highly trained forces and strict discipline. The third is command by influence, also known as mission command, in which the commander outlines desired objectives for subordinates to accomplish and then relies on them to exercise disciplined initiative based on local situational awareness and lowered decision thresholds. Though the three are not mutually exclusive, and are often employed in combination, mission command is the Navy's predominant approach to command.

Command by direction and command by planning seek to eliminate uncertainty. In contrast, mission command seeks to reduce the need for certainty.

Naval warfare remains a human endeavor, a contest of wills dependent on leaders who can understand the balance between time and certainty, and prudently determine risk to exploit fleeting opportunities for mission accomplishment. This requires the cultivation of a confident warfighting culture founded upon technical mastery of weapons, sensors, networks, platforms, and tactics, a relentless mission focus, and the employment of mission command to enable the aggressive but disciplined initiative of subordinates.

### **Mission Command**

Mission command is the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based upon mission type orders and commander's intent. Centuries of global independent operations, with minimal communication back to higher headquarters, have cultivated a rich culture of mission command in the Navy. Nonetheless, it is not enough to rely on heritage alone to reap the warfighting advantages inherent in mission command.

## *Organization, Command and Control, and Fleet Warfare*

Effective mission command is instilled through an institutional development process and daily waterfront interactions that inculcate its precepts in peace, in preparation for war. It is fostered through mutual trust and confidence between leaders and subordinates at all levels of command. It is focused through continuing and common education among officers, interactive conferences, informal discussions, tabletop exercises, war games, experiments, and exercises at sea that address likely tactical scenarios, as well as lessons learned from real-world operations. It is nurtured through personal attention and nourished through practical experience; empowered through shared understanding and enabled by clear commander's intent. It is not an accident of personality or circumstance.

The nature of warfare in the maritime domain has always demanded a high degree of disciplined initiative and independent decision making by deployed commanders in support of a well-defined objective. The changing character of fleet warfare reinforces the requirements for commanders at all levels to exploit the capabilities of mission command based on the variables of the circumstance and commander's judgment.

Mission command is not a blank check, but a carefully understood construct based on trust, clear commander's intent, a shared understanding of desired end state, and a prudent sense of risk, while balancing time and uncertainty. Mission command is as necessary in information-overloaded environments as it is in information deficient ones. Mission command is a strategic investment that maximizes naval combat power.

### **Commander's Intent**

Mission command enabled by commander's intent remains our primary means of aligning tactical activity with strategic effect.

Commander's intent is a clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state that supports mission command, provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander's desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned.

Commander's intent is the essential complement to mission command. It provides unity of effort regarding objective and purpose. Seniors empower their subordinates with the authority, and responsibility, to adapt their methods as the situation unfolds, based on a common understanding of desired outcomes. This requires mutual trust and a shared understanding of the purpose of the mission.

## *Organization, Command and Control, and Fleet Warfare*

The changing character of fleet warfare, where adversaries can increasingly challenge traditional communication paths in maritime, space, and cyberspace domains, or where the immensity of information can overwhelm an improvident commander, requires a commitment to creating shared understanding between seniors and subordinates. This essential element of command relationships is necessary to generate desired tempo of operations, mass effects from distributed forces, and seize the initiative in naval warfare.

*I have concluded that the order [generated from the Navy planning process] is for watchstanders and subordinate planners, the intent is for commanders. It was clear to me that my planners could only get me so far. I needed to add clarity to their words and do it in a manner that made sense to my subordinate commanders. Without that added clarity, the shared awareness, disciplined initiative, and prudent risk-taking I was trying to achieve would remain opaque.<sup>54</sup>*

CAPT Bill Shafley

### **Command and Control in a Denied or Degraded Environment**

Command and control in a denied or degraded environment (C2D2E) is the exercise of C2 while access to and use of critical information, systems, and services are reduced or prevented.<sup>55</sup> This denial may be caused by adversary action, the physical environment, or our own deliberate decisions as we seek surprise or other advantage. Tactical success in such environments will rely heavily on disciplined initiative by commanders wholly aligned with operational objectives.

The challenge posed by C2D2E is that, as our capabilities increase, so too do their burdens and vulnerabilities, whether data links, communication paths, or cyberspace connections. Though these capabilities provide tremendous tactical advantage, they may be vulnerable in degraded or denied C2 environments that adversely affect their performance and tactical relevance. Commanders at all levels must recognize such degradations and compensate with the given means at their disposal.

Science and technology have provided commanders with a remarkable array of tools to enhance decision making and timeliness. The NFC must effectively integrate these systems to maximize warfighting effectiveness, while retaining the ability to fight in denied or degraded environments. We must be able to operate without exquisite capabilities when denied by the adversary, the environment, or by our own accord for operational and tactical advantage. That is the balance between the art and science of exercising C2 in today's information-intensive era.

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<sup>54</sup> Shafley, Bill CAPT. Put the Commander Back in Commander's Intent, Seamanship and Leadership, Center for International Maritime Security, 13 May 2020, <http://cimsec.org/put-the-commander-back-in-commanders-intent/43587>.

<sup>55</sup> NTP 3-32.2, Assured Command and Control (This publication is classified SECRET).

### **KEY POINTS**

- Navy fleets are fighting fleets. The Navy's traditional and doctrinal warfighting organization is the fleet, commanded by an NFC. The numbered fleet is the Navy's highest tactical echelon.
- Fleet commanders, when serving as a CCDR's Service component commander or as a JFMCC, work at the OLW. When NFCs work without those additional OLW duties, they function at the TLW in leading subordinate naval forces.
- Level of warfare is tied to responsibilities within the joint C2 structure or to objective of activity, not to echelon of command.
- The defining challenge of military C2 is the treatment of uncertainty throughout all levels of command.
- Mission command is the Navy's predominant approach to command. Mission command is instilled through an institutional development process and daily waterfront interactions, nurtured through personal attention, and nourished through practical experience. Seniors empower their subordinates with the authority and responsibility to adapt their methods as the situation unfolds, based on a shared understanding of desired outcomes.
- The paradoxical challenge posed by C2D2E is that the more we rely on increasingly capable and sophisticated systems for warfighting efficacy, the more we must ensure that we have a plan for operating without them. We must be able to operate without exquisite capabilities when denied by the adversary, the environment, or by our own accord for operational and tactical advantage.
- Commanders must also strive to deny the enemy their own preferred C2 capabilities.

## Appendix A

# Fleet Command in Fleet Warfare

### The Battle of the Philippine Sea

June 1944

The Battle of the Philippine Sea illustrates some of the complexity inherent in fleet warfare. Campaigns coalesced and levels of warfare compressed in the waters off Saipan in June 1944. Operational objectives competed for attention precisely when outcomes of each were uncertain. Tactical situations unfolded that offered significant operational rewards, depending upon the appropriate balance of time and risk. Different commanders drew different conclusions, yet they still had to fight as a fleet.

A review of this battle provides a case study into the cognitive demands common to fleet warfare. Joint and naval campaigns merged and subsequently had to be parsed under the pressures of pending combat. The first objective, the seizure of the Marianas Islands, supported the joint power projection campaign to enable a strategic bombing campaign on the Japanese mainland. The second, the destruction of the Japanese fleet, reflects the sine qua non of naval warfare, the battle for sea control. Faced with competing operational objectives, ADM Spruance had to determine priorities, apportion forces, align commanders, and balance risk while struggling with incomplete and contradictory information, a rapidly shrinking time line, and a cunning and advancing adversary.

The following time line, interspersed with selected excerpts for context and clarity, describes major elements leading up to and through the significant, yet at the time unsatisfying, battle.<sup>56</sup> In a situation filled with uncertainty, high stakes, and high drama, ADM Spruance made operational decisions, decisions which were debated at the time and still give rise to controversy some 70 years hence.<sup>57</sup>

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56 Unless otherwise noted, all excerpts from CDR Thomas Buell, *Battle of the Philippine Sea*, Proceedings, July 1974, Vol. 100/7/857, excerpted from CDR Thomas Buell, *The Quiet Warrior: A Biography of Admiral Raymond A. Spruance*, Naval Institute Press, 1987.

57 Though the Navy C2 construct in place during World War II does not match the current joint construct within which we fight today, the lessons illustrated by the Battle of the Philippine Sea are timeless and relatable to all commanders operating at the OLV.

## *Fleet Command in Fleet Warfare*

After reviewing the time line, nine key aspects of fleet command in fleet warfare as demonstrated in the Battle of the Philippine Sea are examined:

- Strategy
- Campaigns
- Operational objectives
- Operational environment
- Planning
- Commander's intent
- Mission command
- Decision making
- Assessment.

### **TIME LINE**

#### **Prelude to Battle:**

*During early 1944 the Japanese had hastily reinforced the Marianas, sensing that they were the next logical American objective. But by June 1944 the fortifications were still incomplete, owing to a late start and to continual attacks upon supply convoys by American submarines. Yet the Marianas were formidable, defended by nearly 60,000 troops entrenched in rugged terrain and bolstered by more than 50 tanks and considerable artillery of many sizes.*

*Spruance commanded over 127,000 amphibious assault troops, transported and supported by over 600 ships. Vice Admiral Richmond K. Turner, U.S. Navy and Marine Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith directed the Northern Attack Force, the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions with the 27th Infantry Division in reserve, which would seize Saipan on 15 June. Once Saipan was secured, they would assault adjacent Tinian.*

*Many forces were dedicated to supporting the American assault troops. Vice Admiral John H. Hoover's land-based air forces in the Marshalls, assisted by (Gen. Douglas) MacArthur's air force in the Southwest Pacific, would suppress enemy air in the Caroline Islands. Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher's Task Force 58 would smother Japanese air power in the Mariana, Volcano, and Bonin Islands, and it would shield the amphibious forces from any attacks by the Japanese fleet. The Japanese fleet had avoided any major action since the Battle of Midway, two years before, allowing plenty of time to rearm and retrain its depleted carrier air groups.<sup>58</sup> The Americans estimated that Japan had nine combat-ready carriers in the southern Philippines.*

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<sup>58</sup> Perhaps Buell references Midway because of its familiarity. The Battles of Eastern Solomons (24–25 August 1942) and Santa Cruz (25–27 October 1942) occurred shortly after Midway (4–7 June 1942), but Buell's point stands: it had been nearly 2 years since a major carrier battle.

**May 1944:**

*Opinions varied as to whether the enemy fleet would oppose the Americans in the Marianas. Admirals Chester W. Nimitz and Spruance had discussed the possibility and concluded that the enemy fleet probably would not appear. Spruance assumed that the Japanese would seek a fleet action only when they believed they would have a good chance at success.*

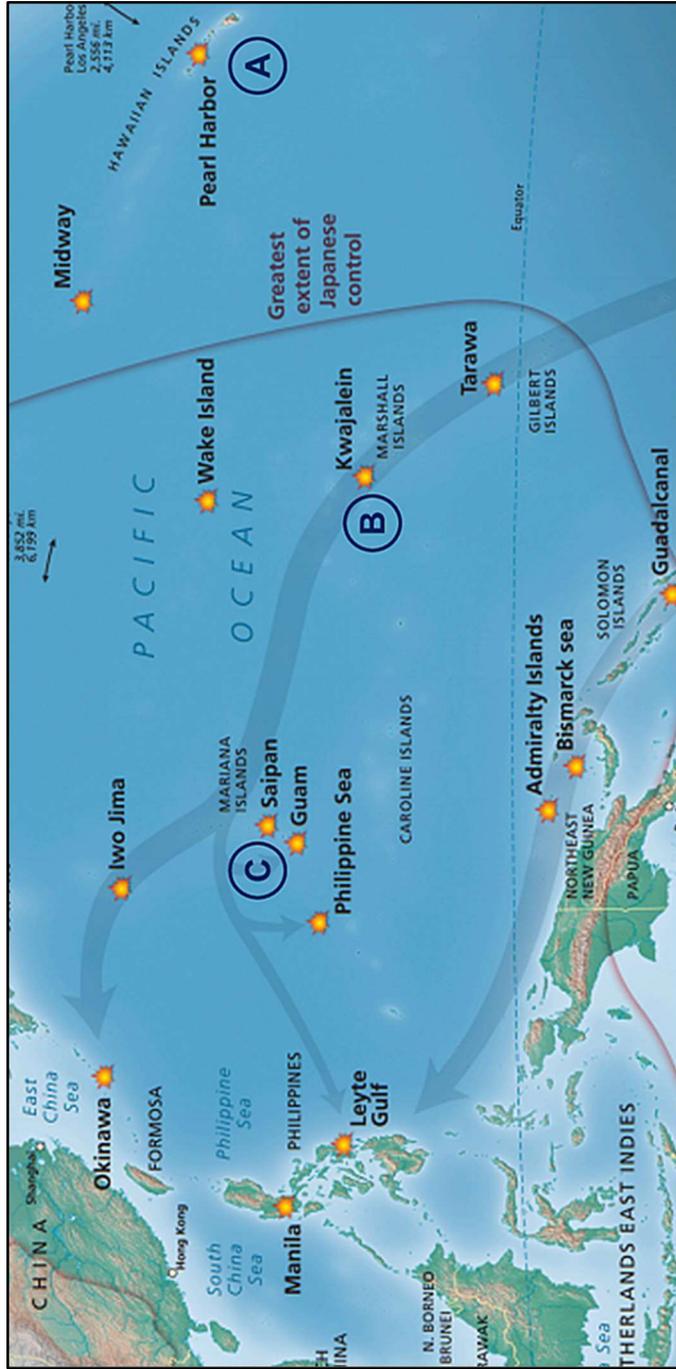
**26 May:** Spruance underway on board Indianapolis, flagship of U.S. Fifth Fleet. Spruance departed Pearl Harbor on 26 May in his flagship, the Indianapolis, and headed for the Marshall Islands, where the Fifth Fleet had assembled in the lagoons of Majuro, Kwajalein, and Eniwetok. There Spruance conferred on final plans with his principal commanders: Turner, Smith, Mitscher, Hoover, and (RADM Richard) Conolly. **(Figure A-1, A and B)**

**9 June:** Spruance and Indianapolis depart Eniwetok to join VADM Mitscher and task force (TF) 58 to begin Marianas campaign.

**11-13 June:** U.S. air and battleship assault on Saipan; minesweepers sweep beach approaches. **(Figure A-1, C)**

**1100, 13 June:** Submarine *Redfin* reports Japanese battle force entering Sulu Sea (4 battleships, 6 cruisers, 6 destroyers). **(Figure A-2, Event 1)**  
*Spruance now turned his attention to the Redfin report. Although it indicated the Japanese Fleet might be headed for Saipan, the report was still inconclusive. Spruance decided to proceed with the Saipan landings on schedule and await further information about the Japanese movements. On the other hand, Spruance had to alert the Fifth Fleet to the implications of the Redfin sighting, and he also had to establish preliminary contingency plans.*

*The implication was that the enemy fleet might assemble and attack the American amphibious forces at Saipan as early as D+2 (17 June).*



**Figure A-1. Fifth Fleet Movements, Pearl Harbor to Saipan, May–June 1944.** Image from World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument-Pacific Battles Map, National Archives Catalog, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/33754842>.

**15 June, D-Day:** Marines land on Saipan; advance to their first day's objectives. *Turner, apparently optimistic after the first day's success, recommended an 18 June D-Day for Guam. Despite the activity of the still-distant Japanese fleet, its intentions remained uncertain, so Spruance approved Turner's recommendation. If progress on Saipan slowed or if the Japanese fleet appeared, he was prepared to reschedule the Guam landings.*

**1835, 15 June:** Submarine *Flying Fish* reports a powerful Japanese naval force (at least 3 carriers, 3 battleships, plus cruisers and destroyers) exiting San Bernardino Strait headed eastward at high speed, able to launch air strikes as early as afternoon 18 June. **(Figure A-2, Event 2)**

**1945, 15 June:** Submarine *Sea Horse* reports an enemy TF 200 nautical miles north of Mindanao, within 2 days steaming of Saipan. **(Figure A-2, Event 2)**

**AM 16 June:**

*Spruance was now certain that the Japanese fleet was seeking a fight and would risk everything in a determined attack while the Americans were entangled in the early and critical part of a large amphibious operation. The 18 June D-Day for Guam clearly was not feasible, and he postponed the Guam landings.*

*The Saipan invasion could not be cancelled, however, because it had been underway for over a day. The American troops would be fighting ashore when and if the Japanese fleet arrived; Spruance therefore scheduled an immediate war council with Turner and Smith.*

**16 June, War Council:**

*"The Japanese are coming after us," said Spruance when he met with Turner and Smith. He was deeply worried about the transports' safety and asked Turner if he could move them to a safer position to the east. Turner replied that the battle ashore was going badly. He was reluctant to evacuate the transports because the troops desperately needed the food and ammunition still in the ships' holds.*

*"Well," replied Spruance, "get everything that you don't absolutely need out of here to the eastward, and I will join up with Mitscher and Task Force 58 and try to keep the Japanese off your neck."*

## *Fleet Command in Fleet Warfare*

### Tactical Preparations:

- Spruance orders Mitscher to assemble and refuel TF 58 on 17 Jun in preparation for battle.
- Mitscher's carriers bombard airfields on Guam and Rota to inhibit Japanese use.
- Long-range seaplanes begin searching for the Japanese fleet to the west of the Marianas.
- Turner dispatches some of his newer heavy-bombardment ships to augment TF 58.

**AM 17 June:** Search planes scouring westward approaches find no Japanese ships.

**0510, 17 June:** Submarine *Cavalla* reports 15-ship Japanese TF 800 nautical miles west-southwest of Saipan. Spruance re-evaluates the Japanese movements. **(Figure A-2, Event 3)**

### **AM 17 June:**

*Spruance considered the possible Japanese tactics. He assumed the Japanese were after Turner's transports. Their attacks probably would begin with long-range carrier aircraft strikes, followed by a surface engagement by their battleships, cruisers, and destroyers. The enemy might split their forces, turn Spruance's flank, and sneak behind TF 58 in order to fall upon Turner's transports off the Saipan beaches.*

*The airfields on Guam and Rota were another threat, because they were within easy range of American forces near Saipan. Despite Mitscher's efforts to neutralize the airfields, the airfields could be continually reinforced by replacements flown in from Volcano and Caroline Islands. Furthermore, the enemy could re-arm and refuel his carrier aircraft on those fields, then re-attack without the planes having to return to their carriers.*

*Spruance pondered the best methods to employ Task Force 58 to meet these threats. His operation orders for all his amphibious campaigns contained a "Major Action Annex," which purported to describe how he intended to fight a fleet action. The annex envisioned that his main body of battleships and cruisers would form a battle line, and the carriers would operate to the rear. This plan, however, was flexible.*

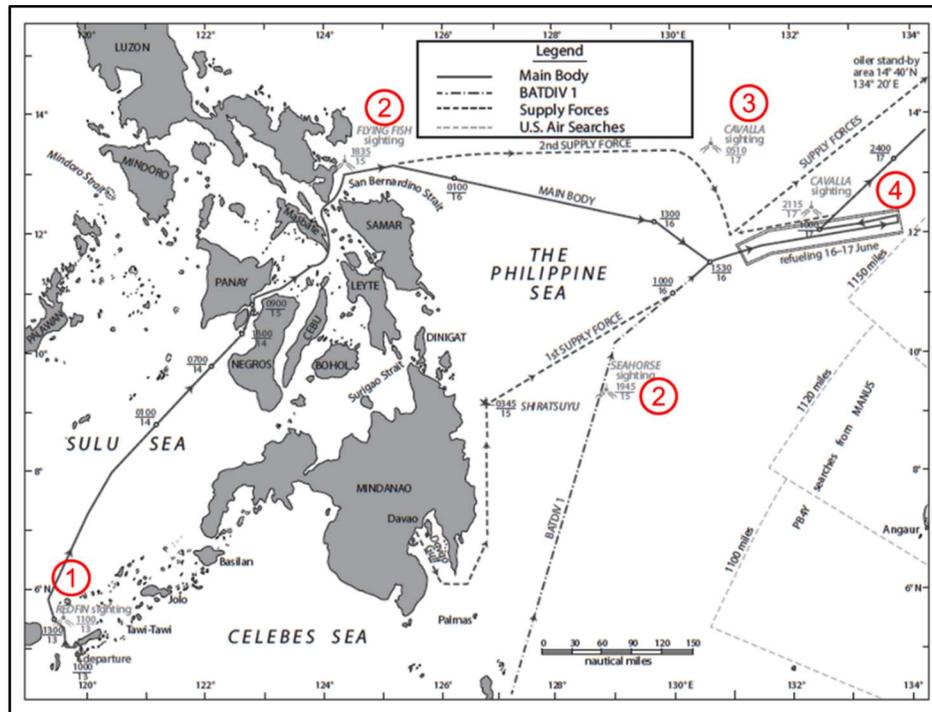


Figure A-2. Days Leading up to the Battle of the Philippine Sea, 13–17 June, 1944<sup>59</sup>

Throughout the morning of the 17th, Spruance and Moore (then-CAPT Carl Moore, chief of staff) discussed what the battle plan would be. Spruance had firmly established in his mind that his primary mission was to protect Turner’s amphibious shipping. He wanted to sink the Japanese fleet if he could, but only if the opportunity arose without risk to Turner’s ships.

**17 June:** Fighting continues on Saipan “hot and heavy,” 1,500+ Americans had been killed, and 4,000+ wounded. Turner’s transports land additional troop reinforcements and supplies. Towards evening, a handful of Japanese planes attacked and hit several amphibious ships; Turner withdraws force to the east.

59 Vego, Milan. HM 22: Major Fleet-versus-Fleet Operations in the Pacific War, 1941–1945, 22. <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/usnwc-historical-monographs/22> (Map 13).

## *Fleet Command in Fleet Warfare*

**PM 17 June:** Spruance writes the battle plan himself, and promulgates it to TF 58:

*“Our air will first knock out enemy carriers as operating carriers, then will attack enemy battleships and cruisers to slow or disable them. Lee’s battle line (VADM Willis A. Lee, Surface Screen Commander for TF 58) will destroy enemy fleet either by fleet action if enemy elects to fight or by sinking slowed or crippled ships if enemy retreats. Action against the retreating enemy must be pushed vigorously by all hands to ensure complete destruction of his fleet.”*

*Spruance’s conventional yet aggressive battle plan was based entirely upon one unstated assumption: his conviction that the Japanese intended to grapple at close quarters off of Saipan.*

**PM 17 June:** Mitscher asks Spruance his intentions for TF 58 that night (17 June):

*Spruance replied: “Desire you proceed at your discretion selecting dispositions and movements best calculated to meet the enemy under most advantageous conditions. I shall issue general directives when necessary and leave details to you and Admiral Lee.”*

*Mitscher created a battle line under Lee’s command with one carrier task group for close support and stationed the other three carrier task groups behind the battle line relative to the expected location of the advancing Japanese Fleet.*

**2115, 17 June:** Submarine *Cavalla* reports Japanese fleet still approaching, 700 nautical miles west-southwest of Saipan. **(Figure A-2, Event 4)**

*Spruance and Moore re-evaluated the Japanese movements, and new conclusions emerged from their analysis. Increased bogey activity indicated that the Japanese were shadowing Task Force 58, and it seemed that the Japanese fleet was not converging upon Saipan as rapidly as it could. It was as if the enemy, knowing where Spruance’s carriers were located, was deliberately staying beyond the range of the American search planes. The enemy seemed to be probing and feinting, as if hoping to hit Turner while avoiding Task Force 58.*

*Spruance concluded that he had again misinterpreted the enemy’s intentions. Before the Marianas operation he had believed that the enemy fleet would not oppose the invasion; then, on the basis of reported enemy movements in the Philippines, he had changed his mind and had assumed they would seek a fleet action. “For the second time it turned out I was wrong,” he (Spreuance) later wrote Nimitz. “Their attitude about risking their fleet had not changed. Their methods of operation*

*had changed, in that they were using carriers again. They intended to use their fleet to exploit any advantages that their carrier air might gain. They had no intention of throwing everything at us by coming in to Saipan at high speed to fight it out.”*

*Spruance now had to change his battle plan to adapt to the newly apparent Japanese tactics. Until he knew the locations of all major elements of the Japanese fleet, he felt he could not leave Saipan unprotected either to attack or to search for the enemy. The Japanese alone would decide the time and the place that the fight would begin. They knew where Spruance was, but he did not know where they were. He would have to wait and let the enemy come to him.*

**AM 18 June:**

*Mitscher reports intentions to sail SW to confront Japanese fleet in likely night action PM 18 June. But Spruance had drastically changed his plans, and he quickly restrained his carrier commander by issuing new instructions: “TF must cover Saipan and our forces in that operation.”*

*Spruance intended to stay near Saipan, searching westward by day, and retiring eastward toward Saipan at night to prevent the Japanese from passing them in the dark. Furthermore, neither Spruance nor Lee wanted a night surface engagement proposed by Mitscher. Spruance’s numerical superiority made him stronger by day, while the hazards of a night melee favored the numerically weaker Japanese, who were better prepared for night action.*

**18 June:** Spruance approves Mitscher’s recommendation to steam westward during the day searching for the Japanese carrier force.

*He would reverse course toward Saipan at nightfall and stay within striking range of the enemy’s northern flank. If search reports were favorable, he would conduct a night-fighter and torpedo attack.<sup>60</sup> Mitscher’s searches to the west were fruitless throughout the day of the 18<sup>th</sup>. Yet bogies continued to shadow the TF, convincing Spruance, more than ever, that the enemy was monitoring his movements with long-range carrier and cruiser planes (Japanese aircraft had 200NM search range advantage due to lack of armor and self-sealing fuel tanks).*

**2000, 18 June:** Spruance turns TF 58 eastward at 2000 to return to vicinity of Saipan.

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<sup>60</sup> ComFifthFleet War Diary for Month of June 1944, p. 18. As noted in Vego, Milan, HM 22: Major Fleet-versus-Fleet Operations in the Pacific War, 1941–1945, Historical Monographs. 22.

*Fleet Command in Fleet Warfare*

**2200, 18 June:** Nimitz sends message to Spruance that CINCPAC radio interceptors located Japanese commander in chief flagship at 2030 located 350 nautical miles west-southwest of TF 58.

**(Figure A-3, Event 5)**

**2325, 18 June:** Mitscher proposes pursuit of Japanese carriers:

*Mitscher contacts Spruance on TBS (acronym for “talk between ships”) and requests to turn westward at 0130 in order to launch attack against Japanese force at 0500:*

*“PROPOSE COMING TO COURSE 270 AT 0130 IN ORDER TO COMMENCE TREATMENT AT 0500. ADVISE.”*

**2346, 18 June:** Submarine *Stingray* transmission is jammed by Japanese forces. *Stingray* is located 135 nautical miles south of suspected Japanese main body. **(Figure A-3, Event 6)**

**0038, 19 June:** Spruance owes Mitscher a response; he must decide whether to go west and seek the enemy or head east and protect the amphibious operation at Saipan.<sup>61</sup> **(Figure A-3, Event 7)**

*Spruance summarized his estimate of the situation to the staff. Nothing was clear, he said. The Japanese fleet might be concentrated, or it might be divided into two or more groups. The enemy might be advancing directly toward Saipan, he might be remaining at long range from Saipan, or he might be maneuvering for a flanking attack from the north, the south, or from both directions.*

*Spruance announced his decision: TF 58 would return to Saipan and would not head west as Mitscher had (again) recommended. Had anyone anything else to say? he asked. All were silent.*

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<sup>61</sup> For a concise and more detailed review of ADM Spruance’s decision, see HM 22: Major Fleet-versus-Fleet Operations in the Pacific War, 1941–1945.

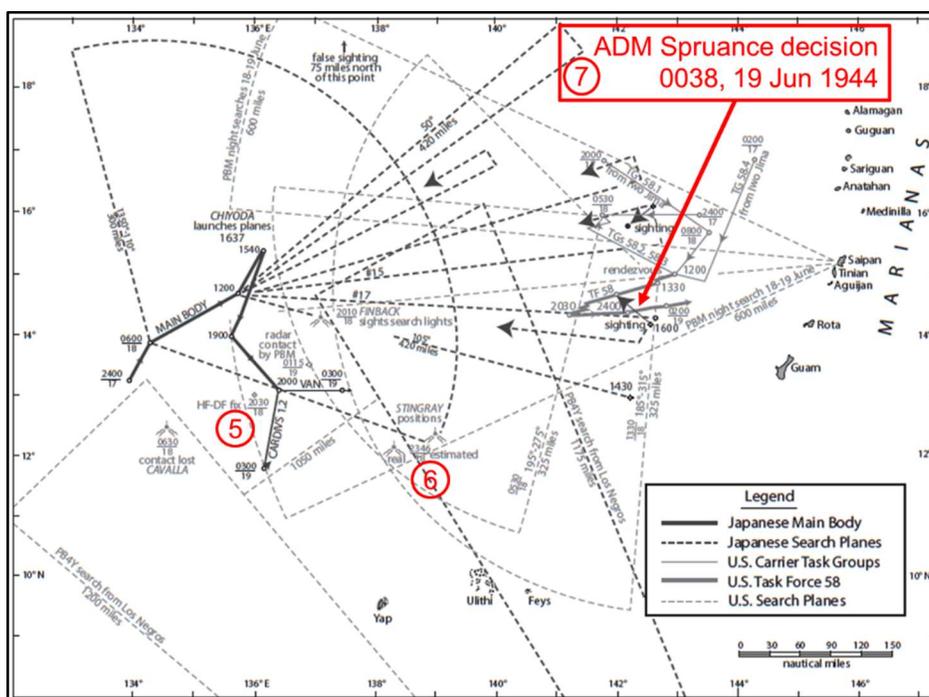


Figure A-3. ADM Spruance’s Decision on the Eve of Battle, 19 June, 1944<sup>62</sup>

*Spruance’s reply to Mitscher: “CHANGE PROPOSED IN YOUR TBS MESSAGE DOES NOT APPEAR ADVISABLE. BELIEVE INDICATION GIVEN BY STINGRAY MORE ACCURATE THAN THAT CONTAINED IN CINCPAC DISPATCH. IF THAT IS SO, CONTINUATION AS AT PRESENT SEEMS PREFERABLE. END RUN BY OTHER FAST ONES REMAINS A POSSIBILITY AND MUST NOT BE OVERLOOKED.”<sup>63</sup>*

<sup>62</sup> Vego, Milan, HM 22: Major Fleet-versus-Fleet Operations in the Pacific War, 1941–1945.

<sup>63</sup> Commander, task force (CTF) 58, action report, Sept 11, 1944, 49 as noted in James D. Hornfischer, *The Fleet at Flood Tide*, Bantam, 2016, p. 175. Hornfischer continues: “With the Fifth Fleet commander’s final refusal to chase west, the second-guessing took root. Arleigh Burke was incredulous. He and his special assistant, Jimmie Thach, stayed up most of the night proposing terse dispatches for Mitscher to send to Spruance, demanding a reversal of course. “We wrote dozens of them,” Thach said, “some stronger than others. Finally, we wrote one that said, ‘You can have my job if you won’t let me run toward the enemy.’ Mitscher wouldn’t send that one. But I would have done it, I’m sure.”

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**0430, 19 June:** Dawn searches from TF 58 find no Japanese force.

**0500, 19 June:** Japanese “bogeys” detected to the southwest flying toward Guam and Rota.

**0500-0930, 19 June:** Aerial dogfights over Guam; U.S. air strikes on airfields and planes.

**1000, 19 June:**

*Hordes of enemy aircraft approach TF 58—some from enemy carriers from west and some from Guam and Rota ... Indianapolis sounded general quarters ... The admiral [Spruance] came to the flag bridge to watch the action. Mitscher was in charge, and Spruance quietly read in his chair during most of the ensuing battle.*

**1000-1500, 19 June:** Aerial combat at sea, dubbed on the deckplates the Great Marianas Turkey Shoot:

*It was a spectacular, one-sided battle. Mitscher's deployment of Task Force 58 worked precisely as envisaged. The enemy planes initially concentrated their attacks on Lee's battle line, stationed in front of the carriers and acting both as a magnet for the Japanese planes and as a buffer for the carriers in the rear. The surface ships belched smoke from their anti-aircraft batteries, darkening the sky with black, bursting flak. The American carriers continually launched and recovered their aircraft, which when airborne climbed into the western sky toward the cloud of attacking Japanese planes.*

Tactical Situation and Direction:

- Japanese carriers remain undetected.
- Spruance sends new orders to Mitscher: “Desire to attack enemy tomorrow if we know his position with sufficient accuracy.”

**1800, 19 June:** Spruance has reliable reports that a submarine torpedoed a Japanese carrier 175 nautical miles west of TF 58, Spruance and TF 58 chase Japanese force to the west.

**1000, 20 June:** Japanese forces remain undetected, Spruance tells Mitscher that if they find nothing by end of the day, they will return to Saipan.

**1545, 20 June:** Search planes locate Japanese force 300 nautical miles west of TF 58:

*If TF 58 launched that afternoon, the aviators would have to conserve their fuel, attack in dusk, and land at night with gas tanks nearly empty.*

## *Fleet Command in Fleet Warfare*

*The Americans might be able to wreak considerable damage upon the enemy, but a follow-up attack in the morning would be nearly impossible owing to the confusion and delay of a night recovery. Mitscher therefore told Spruance that the carriers “were firing in their bolt,” and that he wanted to attack immediately. Spruance concurred.*

**1630, 20 June:** 226 aircraft launch to attack Japanese force.

**1645, 20 June:** Distance to enemy fleet revised to 330 nautical miles.

**1830-1900, 20 June:** Uncoordinated aerial attack against Japanese fleet.

**2100-2300, 20 June:** Distressed night recovery aboard carriers:

*The ships turned on their lights and fired star shells and flares to guide the aircraft home. The returning planes plopped aboard any flight deck they could find. Many planes fell short; either from battle damage or fuel exhaustion, and destroyers rescued the pilots. The scene before Spruance was unreal: planes milling overhead and crashing in the water; the tired, strained voices of exhausted pilots on the radio; searchlight beams stabbing the sky as homing beacons, or sweeping the water in search of survivors; ghostly flares sputtering over the warm, calm waters fired by gallant pilots in life jackets waiting for rescue.*

**1920, 20 June:** The Battle of the Philippine Sea is over:

*At 1920, when Task Force 58 was 675 miles west of Saipan and 545 miles from Samar in the central Philippines, Spruance admitted that the enemy was out of reach and ordered retirement.*

*In the sense that the Japanese Fleet had escaped, the battle had been inconclusive, but they had not escaped without damage. Enemy losses in ships—three carriers and two oilers—amounted to over 100,000 tons, but this was nothing compared to the loss of practically an entire carrier air force which had been built up and trained at great effort. While six carriers were on their way home, they were of little use without pilots to operate from them. Later events showed quite clearly how effectively Japanese naval aviation had been destroyed. In the very next month the Japanese considered a plan to take the entire surface force back to the Marianas for one final battle but called it off for lack of air strength. Fleet opposition to our landings in the Palaus was impossible for the same reason. But more important still, the Japanese Fleet had failed to destroy, or even interrupt, our forces engaged in the capture of Saipan. A battle had been won which, with the possible exception of Midway, would have more influence on the final outcome than any other battle of the whole war. And, it had been accomplished without the loss of a single ship.*

## *Fleet Command in Fleet Warfare*

*All of this was not known by the men of Task Force 58. Even if it were, it would probably have been small comfort to them. They could see nothing but a relatively unharmed enemy fleet disappearing over the horizon and with it an opportunity which might never come again. In what probably expressed the full measure of their chagrin, Admiral Mitscher summed up the situation:*

*The enemy had escaped. He had been badly hurt by one aggressive carrier air strike at the one time he was within range. His fleet was not sunk.*<sup>64</sup>

### **Epilogue:**

*The Japanese suffered irreplaceable losses: 476 planes and 445 aviators. The Americans lost 130 planes and 43 aviators. American submarines sank two enemy carriers on the 19th, and Mitscher's aviators sank a third and damaged two others during the dusk attack on the 20th. Although six Japanese carriers survived to steam another day, their overwhelming loss of planes and aviators emasculated their fighting strength for the remainder of the war. The Japanese carrier navy remained afloat but impotent.*

### **A Japanese perspective:**

*During the Pacific War there were two decisive naval battles in which the whole outcome of the war hung in the balance. First was the Battle of Midway in early June, 1942 ... The second was in mid-June, 1944, the Battle of the Philippine Sea. There were many defects still to be remedied in our carrier striking force, but Combined Fleet was able to engage in battle with a fair degree of self-confidence. Once again, we suffered an aerial defeat in the opening phase of the battle which drove us to a general retreat.*<sup>65</sup>

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64 Van Wyen, Adrian O. The Battle of The Philippine Sea, February 1951 Proceedings Vol. 77/2/576.

65 Koyanagi, Tomijo RADM (ADM Kurita's chief of staff). With Kurita in the Battle for Leyte Gulf, Proceedings, February 1953, Vol. 79/2/600.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Battle of the Philippine Sea was seen at the time as a tactical victory, but a lost operational opportunity: “The enemy had escaped.” Nonetheless, ADM Spruance’s Fifth Fleet supported the Marianas campaign through the final capitulation of enemy forces on Guam on 8 August, thus achieving his assigned mission of seizing the islands from the Japanese. One year later, the strategic bombing that would end the war in the Pacific originated from the Marianas island of Tinian.

As seen in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, a specific tactical engagement can accomplish operational objectives leading to strategic effects. This battle exemplifies the compression of levels of warfare common in the maritime domain where tactical outcomes often have pronounced operational and strategic impact.

The introduction of a second operational objective, the destruction of the Japanese fleet, offers the opportunity for a retrospective look at a fleet commander and staff wrestling in real time to account for a new operational reality while in the midst of pursuing their initial mandate.

To aid this contextual review, doctrinal terms associated with operational art are defined below and then compared against the exigencies of the circumstances surrounding various elements of the Battle of the Philippine Sea.

We will use this method to briefly examine the following as they pertained to the Battle of the Philippine Sea:

- Strategy
- Campaigns
- Operational objectives
- Operational environment
- Planning
- Commander’s intent
- Mission command
- Decision-making
- Assessment.

## *Fleet Command in Fleet Warfare*

### **Strategy**

Strategy. An idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives. (JP 3-0)

The stated challenge of the fleet commander lies in determining the sequence and arrangement of force and capability in space, time, and purpose in a manner most advantageous to successful tactical outcomes leading to strategic objectives. Circumstances, however, may color the execution of this straightforward decree. The back story leading to the Marianas campaign suggests that in joint and combined arenas, various ways of developing strategy to achieve operational and strategic objectives may differ among stakeholders.

*General Douglas MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief of the Southwest Pacific Area, had vociferously argued that the main axis of advance (to Japan) should be westward along the northern coast of New Guinea to the Philippines, and that Nimitz's forces should be in a supporting role for his advance. Under Admiral King, the Navy pushed for an advance across the central Pacific, through the Caroline Islands (with atoll lagoons suitable for massive fleet anchorages), with the intent of achieving a lodgment either on Formosa (now Taiwan) or the coast of China. The Army-Navy impasse was broken when the U.S. Army Air Forces broke with the Army and sided with the Navy and the Central Pacific campaign, with the stipulation that the Marianas be taken. From there, the new B-29 bomber could reach Japan. The Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a directive on 12 March 1944 calling for the occupation of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam by 15 June under the command of Admiral Chester Nimitz.<sup>66</sup>*

RADM Samuel J. Cox, H-Gram 032

Though a synopsis of a complex process, it illustrates expected tensions in the determination of the ways to achieve operational and strategic objectives in wartime conditions requiring fleet warfare.<sup>67</sup>

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66 Cox, Samuel RADM. H-Gram 032: Operation Forager and the Battle of the Philippine Sea, Attachment 1, Navy History and Heritage Command, June 2019.

67 See *The General's War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf*, by Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor for a more recent example (DESERT STORM) of tensions inherent in determining ways to achieve operational and strategic objectives in a joint and combined environment.

## **Campaigns**

|   |
|---|
| <p>Campaign. A series of related operations aimed at achieving strategic and operational objectives within a given time and space. (JP 5-0)</p> |
|---|

Campaigns coalesced off the coast of Saipan in June 1944. The first was the campaign to seize the Marianas Islands to begin bombing the Japanese mainland with new long-range United States Army Air Forces B-29s. The other was the campaign against the Japanese fleet, for in fleet warfare maneuverability is the prize, not territory. As long as the Japanese fleet possessed the possibility of impeding the allies' push to the Japanese mainland, it was a threat to be defeated, whenever and wherever found.

The Marianas campaign fits neatly into the joint definition above, seize the islands within the timetable to enable subsequent use of the airfields to bomb Japan. Alternatively, the case study suggests that fleet warfare is a more open-ended campaign that does not adhere neatly within the given time and space doctrinal qualifier. Given the operational framework, attritional nature, and historical record of fleet warfare, a more appropriate description may be "when and where conditions are favorable."

Planning for a campaign is appropriate when the contemplated military operations exceed the scope of a single operation. Thus, campaigns are often the most extensive joint operations in terms of time and other resources. CCDRs document the full scope of their campaigns in the set of plans that includes the campaign plan and all its subordinate and supporting plans. CCDRs plan and conduct campaigns and operations, while Service and functional components conduct operations, activities, battles, and engagements. It bears specific note that these are not independent campaigns. CCDRs or functional component commanders can plan and conduct subordinate campaigns or operations in support of another combatant command's campaign.

The Battle of the Philippine Sea demonstrates that freedom of action from and within the maritime domain is the Naval Service's greatest contribution to the joint campaign. Both campaigns, the one to seize the islands and the one to destroy the enemy fleet, were prosecuted with the singular purpose of enabling joint power projection into mainland Japan to compel surrender and end the war.

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### **Operational Objectives**

Objective. 1. The clearly defined, decisive, and attainable goal toward which an operation is directed. (JP 5-0)

Two operational objectives competed for resources and attention during the Battle of Philippine Sea.

The first objective, seize Saipan, was part of a sequential campaign to wrest control of the Marianas Islands from the Japanese. This was part of a larger campaign to project power onto the Japanese mainland.

The complementary objective, destroy the Japanese fleet, was part of a cumulative campaign against Japanese naval capability. This was part of the Navy's effort to eliminate Japanese ability to contest the sea. The approaching enemy fleet was the COG of that campaign, though with a separate, unbounded time line.

ADM Spruance recognized the opportunity presented by the tactical situation to make progress in the cumulative campaign against Japanese maritime war-making capability; but, he did so without forsaking the sequential campaign necessary for joint power projection.

Joint doctrine states the commander must be able to describe the current state of the OE, the assessed OE throughout the operation or campaign, and the desired state of the OE when operations conclude to visualize an approach to solving the problem.<sup>68</sup> However, an underlying and unbounded campaign against an enemy fleet will require constant consideration in addition to other efforts supporting the joint force.

### **Operational Environment**

Operational environment. The aggregate of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander. (JP 3-0)

Joint doctrine further amplifies this already broad definition by identifying no less than 31 different factors in an attempt to demonstrate the complexity of a "holistic view of the operational environment."<sup>69</sup> However, the primary driver in the above

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<sup>68</sup> JP 5-0, p. IV-6, 3.c.2.

<sup>69</sup> JP 5-0, Figure IV-2, Holistic View of the Operational Environment. Joint doctrine further specifies that understanding the OE helps the JFC to better identify the problem; anticipate potential outcomes; and understand the results of various friendly, adversary, and neutral actions and how these actions affect attaining the military end state.

scenario was an obvious and singular change in the operational environment, the approach of the Japanese fleet and the dawning awareness of the threat by Fifth Fleet.

Conditions of fleet warfare provide conceptual clarity to the above joint doctrinal guidance. By the time of the Marianas campaign in mid-1944, the nature of information requirements had shifted from the operational to the tactical, and a detailed understanding of the OE was less significant than trying to discern the tactical realities that lay over the horizon. As the arc of activity shifted from planning to execution in the days leading to battle, and the time line compressed from the operational to the tactical, information required by all levels of command narrowed in scope and specificity.

Though the doctrinal term had not yet been coined at the time, ADM Spruance's primary commander's critical information requirement at the outset of the campaign was whether the Japanese fleet would engage in battle. As that question resolved over the days leading to confrontation, information requirements shifted from the operational to the tactical, from whether they would attack, to the more detailed questions regarding when, where, and how they would attack.

Note the value of the sighting reports from the submarines. Their independent and corroborating reports reduced uncertainty at the operational level—"Spruance was now certain that the Japanese fleet was seeking a fight"—and enabled focus on management of the uncertainties at the tactical level. Though our ISRT capabilities, what Wayne Hughes would call scouting, have magnified over time, this example demonstrates their timeless value.

Technology now enables joint force and component commanders and their staffs to access in near-real-time, very large amounts of information relating to aspects of the OE. Information covering a wide range of issues relating to friendly, neutral, and enemy forces and the civilian populace will be available throughout the joint force. There will also be a large volume of information concerning weather, terrain, cultural influences, and other aspects of the OE.<sup>70</sup> Many of the parameters listed in joint doctrine make perfect sense when considering the entire joint theater; but, as the above example demonstrates, for purposes of fleet warfare, determination of the most significant elements of the OE is paramount.

*Ultimately, our goal is not to create perfect situational awareness, but rather to leverage the most important commodity to a commander—time—to think through multiple concepts of operations which can be used to jump start subordinate planning as battlefield conditions and objectives become more apparent.<sup>71</sup>*

ADM Scott H. Swift

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<sup>70</sup> JP 2-0, p. I-1.

<sup>71</sup> Swift, Scott ADM. A Fleet Must Be Able To Fight.

## *Fleet Command in Fleet Warfare*

### **Navy Planning Process**

The Navy planning process entails six steps: mission analysis, COA development, COA analysis/war gaming, COA comparison and decision, plan or order development, and transition.

Elements of each of these steps are discernable in the scenario above. Mission analysis was a fluid process as understanding of the OE evolved. Submarine sightings within an hour of each other, the evening of 15 June, of two separate Japanese TFs, required a reconsideration of the plan to land at Guam on 18 June. ADM Spruance convened a war council to review information to date and revise the overall landing plan based on a changing OE. On 16 June, he ordered a number of activities in preparation for combat, and on 17 June, he developed a COA that he promulgated that evening. Later that night, additional information, the sighting report from submarine *Cavalla*, made him realize again that his assumptions for major fleet combat in the vicinity of Saipan were flawed, and that the Japanese would likely use carrier air to strike at his TF from distance. By the morning of 18 June, he realized that he would have to choose between seeking the enemy fleet and protecting the landing at Saipan. This led to a day of discussion and debate with his staff and his subordinate commanders regarding the best COA to take. New and contradictory information received late the evening of 18 June provided no additional clarity and perhaps confused tactical understanding even more. At 0038, 19 June, ADM Spruance provided the guidance that led to the next day's aerial combat.

The planning process was perhaps not as neat as doctrine might propose, but all the elements were present, considered, and revisited to account for new information as it arrived.

*Human experience shows that people, not organizations or management systems, gets things done.*

ADM Hyman G. Rickover

### **Commander's Intent**

Commander's intent. A clear and concise expression of the purpose of an operation and the desired objectives and military end state. (JP 3-0)

The abbreviated synopsis provides several instances of ADM Spruance conveying commander's intent throughout the evolving situation. His operations orders for amphibious campaigns contained a Major Action Annex to describe how he intended to fight a fleet action if required. He conferred with his principal

commanders while at anchor in various Marshall Island lagoons prior to sailing to Saipan. As the prospect for fleet battle dawned, he convened a war council with VADM Turner and Lt. Gen. Smith on 16 June to discuss and direct activity and resources. As the enemy fleet approached, ADM Spruance rewrote and transmitted new battle plans on 17 June: “our air will first knock out enemy carriers as operating carriers ...” As TF 58 prepared for combat, ADM Spruance had several TBSs and written radio conversations outlining priorities and directing maneuvers to ensure fleet battle would be fought under the advantageous conditions of daylight.

Commander’s intent certainly evolved with the changing situation. ADM Spruance provided subordinate commanders his understanding of the situation and his thinking as it evolved, and provided guidance and direction appropriate to that understanding. This did not happen without debate. VADM Mitscher, and his chief of staff, CAPT Burke, were vocal and persistent in letting the fleet commander know how they thought events should unfold. Though there may have been disagreement over best COAs, the back and forth enhanced a shared understanding in an environment defined by incomplete and uncertain information. That shared understanding was essential to the preparation for and execution of successful sea battle.

### **Mission Command**

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|--|
| Mission command. The conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based upon mission-type orders. (JP 3-0) |
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Though hints of personality appear in the above scenario, there was an underlying trust and confidence between commanders. This mission command relationship enabled thoughtful (even forceful) deliberations as the situation evolved as well as appropriate autonomy as battle unfolded—“Spreuance quietly read in his chair ...”

This appeared to be a practiced arrangement. In the days preceding battle, Spruance relied on Mitscher to position TF 58 as he saw necessary to meet the enemy under the most advantageous conditions—“Desire you proceed at your discretion.”

It is interesting to note that on both occasions Mitscher directed tactical arrangements in preparation for battle he used the general organization contained in Spruance’s Major Action Annex by placing a line of battleships between the approaching Japanese fleet and U.S. carriers.

This may reflect the warfighting sensibilities of the marshalled naval power, and probably entailed previous discussions regarding best tactical disposition and fleet combat with such forces. In any event, it is apparent that there was a like-mindedness between U.S. commanders regarding tactics when confronting

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an opposing carrier force. Spruance did not need to provide additional specific detail once he established the primary objective. Since there were no battleships available for the Battle of Midway, and only one at the Battle of Eastern Solomons, the most recent carrier battle 2 years prior, this tactical arrangement would have been the result of battle-line-with-carrier exercises of the 1930s, wargaming battle lines and carriers at Newport, and contemplation and conversation among commanders, rather than experience. Thus, mission command enabled by commander's intent at the Battle of the Philippine Sea was not an inspired accident of personality, but a practiced relationship based on prewar preparation and the realities of war. Spruance determined the operational objective, and "quietly read" while Mitscher fought the tactical fight.

*In its highest state, shared context and understanding is implicit and intuitive between hierarchal and lateral echelons of command, enabling decentralized and distributive formations to perform as if they were centrally coordinated. When achieved, these practices result in decentralized formal decision-making throughout the force, leading implicitly to the opportunity to gain advantageous operational tempo over adversaries.<sup>72</sup>*

Gen. Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff  
Mission Command White Paper

### **Decision Making**

Decision. In an estimate of the situation, a clear and concise statement of the line of action intended to be followed by the commander as the one most favorable to the successful accomplishment of the assigned mission. (JP 5-0)

OLW decisions affect milestones en route to strategic effects.

ADM Spruance made several such decisions in the scenario above. The first was the initial determination to land at Saipan as scheduled on 15 June, aware at the time of the *Redfin* sighting of the Japanese Battleship TF. He then delayed the Guam landing when the tactical situation indicated fleet combat was likely.

A decision requires first an estimate of the situation, and the one presented by ADM Spruance on the night of 18/19 June was succinct: "Nothing was clear." He didn't know where the enemy was, he didn't know what their disposition was, and he didn't know what their ultimate target was. Yet he had to decide.

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<sup>72</sup> Dempsey, Martin Gen. Mission Command White Paper, 3 April 2012.

He had a solid grasp of the shrinking time line and well understood the bounds of uncertainty. He made the OLW decision to buy down risk to the Marianas campaign by closing Saipan, knowing that in doing so he was ceding the initiative to the Japanese in the coming fleet battle. Yet he had done so under advantageous circumstances, ensuring that combat would likely take place by day.

This also demonstrates the common tradeoffs between time and risk. Had he sought the Japanese fleet as Mitscher recommended at 2325 on 18 June, proposing a dawn attack launch, he would have decreased the time to likely combat, but at an increased risk to the Saipan landing.

The combination of courage, ethical leadership, judgment, intuition, situational awareness, and the capacity to consider contrary views helps commanders make insightful decisions in complex situations. These attributes can be gained over time through training, education, and experience. Effective commanders combine judgment and visualization with information to determine whether a decision is required, when to decide, and what to decide with sufficient speed to maintain the initiative.

### **Assessment**

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| Assessment. 1. A continuous process that measures the overall effectiveness of employing capabilities during military operations. 2. Determination of the progress toward accomplishing a task, creating a condition, or achieving an objective. (JP 3-0) |
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Theater strategic and operational-level assessments provide a methodology for joint commands and Services to adjust planning and execution to be more effective, match the dynamic OE, and better identify their risks and opportunities.

Fleet warfare, however, entails the burden of trying to discern the level of remaining enemy capability. Specific campaigns will have their own assessment criteria. Certainly, in the Marianas land campaign, the level of resistance provided obvious and real-time feedback. Unlike measuring progress in terms of territory seized, however, the Battle of Philippine Sea demonstrates fleet warfare assessments must be measured against remaining enemy capability.

Commanders all knew that fleet combat of 19 June was very successful; by the end of the day, they had a good sense of the number of enemy aircraft U.S. forces had knocked from the sky. This enabled ADM Spruance to balance campaign assessments and conclude that the landings were sufficiently safe from Japanese naval threat without TF 58 carrier protection, and there was a window within which he could pursue the enemy fleet. He then re-apportioned forces between the two campaigns—freeing TF 58 from their protection duties near Saipan and directing them westward to pursue the Japanese. Assessment enabled him to change operational objectives.

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Assessment in the fleet warfare campaign however, held that the Japanese carriers were still a potent force, capable of inhibiting U.S. freedom of action, despite their losses of aircraft and crew. The strength of that assessment is manifest in the boldness of the launch of 226 planes in the late afternoon of 20 June, doubtful from the outset of their ability to safely return. Assessment of remaining enemy capability compelled them to attack.<sup>73</sup>

Technology and processes to assist and enable assessment have evolved greatly since the fabled attack of 20 June 1944. What has not changed however, is the focus on enemy capability as the measure of effectiveness in fleet warfare and the fundamental focus of operational assessment. Joint campaigns will have their own specific assessment criteria, but a tandem and ever-present assessment effort will always be required to track the capability of the enemy fleet.

Assessment in fleet warfare will invariably reduce to estimating the enemy's capability to inhibit our maneuverability and freedom of action in the maritime domain. Fleet ADM King's guidance to the Navy in his 1944 War Instructions underscores this point: "Sink enemy ships. It is usually better to sink one than to damage two."<sup>74</sup>

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73 Of note, the assessment of residual fleet capability, despite the losses of air crew and planes, led ADM William "Bull" Halsey to chase north to seek those same emasculated carriers during the Battle of Leyte Gulf 4 months later, thereby leaving the San Bernardino Strait open for Kurita's battleship force to steam through and threaten the Leyte landing, until they encountered CDR Ernest Evans, and the rest of Taffy 3.

74 This tactical guidance reflects the staying power of ships fighting with weapons of the times, primarily guns and torpedoes. The reader would do well to consider Wayne Hughes and Robert Girrier's guidance in *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations*, p. 158: "The tactical rule is to put every threatening enemy ship out of action first. A firepower kill is the proper tactical measure of effectiveness; a sinking may be a broader campaign goal." The planned distribution of fires against enemy ships deserves considerable pre-combat attention and perhaps discussion in fighting instructions.

## CONCLUSION

The Battle of the Philippine Sea illustrates the complexities and ambiguities of fleet warfare.

Campaigns converged, objectives competed, and tactical and operational levels of warfare became intertwined. Commanders had differing perspectives and different ideas. Information was uncertain. Dangers to force and mission were real and growing. Risk and time were moving in opposite directions. And, when it was over, despite spectacular results, immediate impacts were unsatisfying, and debates persisted.

Through it all, the fleet commander continually assessed the changing situation, established priorities, aligned his commanders, and monitored the action. In the end he allowed as much combat as he thought he could afford without jeopardizing the assault on Saipan. He knowingly bought down risk to mission by ceding initiative to the Japanese. They knew where he was, but he didn't know where they were until the day after aerial combat.

In the face of incomplete and contradictory information, valid (and passionate) argument on both sides, and under the shrinking time constraints of an approaching enemy fleet, with troops engaged in fierce combat ashore, ADM Spruance had to decide what his fleet would do. Other commanders may have determined differently, but one fleet commander alone was charged with making the call.

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The observations for fleet command from this case study are as relevant today as they were during those momentous days of June 1944:

- The art of fleet command involves determining effort between multiple and competing imperatives, aligning action in ambiguous circumstances, and balancing risk and time amid tremendous uncertainty, all while under great pressure.
- The science of fleet command involves organizing and preparing forces, planning effectively, and creating processes that reduce and enhance decision cycles across the force.
- The action of fleet warfare is enabled through mission command, empowered by shared understanding and a trust and confidence that extends across leaders at all levels.

And yet success remains at its core, a uniquely human endeavor: to lead people in a massive undertaking of great risk and consequence, while establishing among each a sense of purpose and team, such that, despite all the intricacies involved in the long line leading to the moment of battle, at the right instant, every spear is pointed precisely, every mind is focused intently, and every person is resolute on the fulfillment of their duty.

Such is the mantle of fleet command.

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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>C2</b>     | command and control                                       |
| <b>C2D2E</b>  | command and control in a denied or degraded environment   |
| <b>CCDR</b>   | combatant commander                                       |
| <b>CNO</b>    | chief of naval operations                                 |
| <b>COA</b>    | course of action  |
| <b>COG</b>    | center of gravity   |
| <b>CTF</b>    | commander, task force                                     |
| <b>EMBS</b>   | electromagnetic battle space                              |
| <b>FRAGO</b>  | fragmentary order   |
| <b>GPC</b>    | great power competition                                   |
| <b>ISRT</b>   | intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting |
| <b>JFC</b>    | joint force commander                                     |
| <b>JFMCC</b>  | joint force maritime component commander                  |
| <b>JP</b>     | joint publication   |
| <b>MOC</b>    | maritime operations center                                |
| <b>NCC</b>    | Navy component commander                                  |
| <b>NDP</b>    | naval doctrine publication                                |
| <b>NFC</b>    | numbered fleet commander                                  |
| <b>NWP</b>    | Navy warfare publication                                  |
| <b>OE</b>     | operational environment                                   |
| <b>OLW</b>    | operational level of warfare                              |
| <b>OPLAN</b>  | operational plan  |
| <b>PRC</b>    | People's Republic of China                                |
| <b>SECDEF</b> | Secretary of Defense                                      |
| <b>SLOC</b>   | sea line of communication                                 |
| <b>SLW</b>    | strategic level of warfare                                |
| <b>TBS</b>    | talk between ships  |
| <b>TE</b>     | task element  |
| <b>TF</b>     | task force  |
| <b>TG</b>     | task group  |

**TLW** tactical level of warfare  
**U.S.C.** United States Code

### **Multifleet operations—unified action and delegated authority**

*The ideal in war is to achieve similar collaboration of all commanders vertically and laterally, so that cohesive action results. It should be easy to understand why perfect unity is hard to achieve, because prosecution of a campaign entails decentralized authority and responsibility. Evidently, the ideal is rarely attained. The best, but imperfect results come from:*

- *Sound doctrine that fosters operational and tactical unity of action*
- *Sound training that prepares all echelons for teamwork*
- *Sound experience that comes from enough of the right kind of war making to know what to expect of companions in positions of authority and responsibility.*

*These three cornerstones of success are preparations at the operational level, not the responsibility of tacticians, at least not at sea.*

Wayne Hughes

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