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PROFESSIONAL READING

Of Tactics, Doctrine and Rules Made to be Broken

Captain David G. Clark, U.S. Navy

Hughes, Wayne P. *Fleet Tactics: Theory and Practice*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1986. 316pp. \$21.95

“There is nothing, absolutely nothing, half so much worth doing, as simply messing about in boats.”

It was 1972 when I was reintroduced to that quote from *Wind in the Willows* upon finding it engraved in brass and hanging on the paneled wall of Wayne Hughes’ den in Norfolk. It epitomizes the philosophical bent of our Navy’s leading scholar and teacher of naval warfare. Wayne has spent his lifetime comprehending the conflicts of mankind at sea and mastering warfare in that environment. Political expediency is not in his nature—he is one of those gifted naval officers who has been willing to do what is essential to advance our ability to fight at sea. Through command at sea, duty in the Pentagon, loyal service on fleet staffs and years of operations analysis, he has earned the right to be heard. Now he has written the first authoritative work on naval tactics since the late thirties when Admiral and Mrs. S.S. Robison wrote *A History of Naval Tactics from 1530 to 1930*.

After a Navy career in Surface Warfare, including destroyer command, Captain Clark joined the Operations faculty at the Naval War College; he is now the College’s Director of Continuing Education.

Captain Hugh Nott, late of the Naval War College and cut of the same cloth, assisted in the conception of this work and would have been the coauthor had he lived. Hugh would have been proud of this work.

As the author states in his introduction, there will be four groups of readers of this book:

- First, it "is intended to reawaken interest among the American naval officer corps in the study of tactics."

- Second, it is for the layman who "speaks with more eloquence than the navy's blue uniformed theologians and at his best offers wise and detached insights over the years."

- Third, it is aimed at "... the youngster of about thirteen years (for whom) I want to fill the void in the literature of tactics"

- And last, "... a fourth and uninvited reader. He is in the Soviet Academy of Science, and he is the one person I am sure will not only read but study and dissect this book."

All four of Professor/Captain Hughes' audiences will find something of value in this text. And each will be frustrated that the topic is not wrapped up neatly in a manner which could resolve all disputes. Both the historian and the futurist will be intrigued by his thoughtful historical analyses. The operations analyst will be fascinated by his pragmatic approach to naval warfare and the conclusions he draws. It should be inspirational reading for the downtrodden Washington naval commuter after a long day of five-sided frustration on the banks of the Potomac.

First, a premise: you cannot have tactics without doctrine. For years the U.S. Navy has shown great reluctance to establish doctrine. Some reasons are quite valid; as the author points out when appreciating his fourth (Soviet) readership, "I hope I have been suitably enigmatic in matters of current U.S. Navy doctrine." According to Hughes, "*Doctrine* is one of the military's most elusive words. The U.S. Navy has usually avoided the problem by ignoring it. This is unfortunate. Doctrine as a concept and as a practice should be carefully delineated and put to work." Early on he states that "Doctrine unites action . . . influences and is influenced by training, technology, tactics and objectives . . . should be specific, designed to achieve the best results from a united team, but should also allow room for inspired tactics and initiative."

Where is today's U.S. Navy doctrine? The U.S. Army has *FM 100-1* and *FM 100-5*; the U.S. Air Force has *AFM 1-1*. For an unclassified Navy source we are referred to *NWP-1, Strategic Concepts of the U.S. Navy*. But that's a sausage and as an old Vermonter would say, "It looks and smells appealing, but once you get it skinned and gutted there ain't much to it." The few useful pages are Washington management and programming generalities. If not there, then where? In platform manuals written by civilian consultants? In NWPs prepared by well-meaning but overworked committees of naval officers? In

the hearts of a few dedicated officers concerned with winning at sea rather than in not losing in the Pentagon? Or is it too highly classified to be shared with those who must execute it?

Can we learn about doctrine from RCA's designers of the Aegis system? Here the doctrine for every contingency is programmed beforehand, then the computer is left to operate the weapon systems of the *Ticonderoga* class with man overriding only at high risk. The immense volume of today's battle space, combined with the high speed of and short reaction time granted by today's weapons, has forced this. Shooting from the hip is no longer a solution, if it ever was.

Navies of today will be no more precise in executing doctrine than in Nelson's navy. Naval combat operations entail competition with a desperate enemy, making decisions under risk of death, while shrouded in the "fog of war." An analysis of any of Nelson's battles shows little similarity to the neat tactical precision he set down *a priori*. Yet, thanks to his memoranda and the inculcation of his captains with flexible doctrine, his outnumbered fleet would prevail at Trafalgar despite his death during battle, and then with only signals that were more inspirational than educational, sent to "amuse" his men. On the other hand, Admiral Villeneuve, who had witnessed "the Nelson touch" firsthand off Aboukir Island seven years before, seemed to shrug and advise his captains rather to look to their own "courage and thirst for glory, than to the signals of the commander-in-chief" for guidance during this battle, because he would be occupied with the enemy himself and his signals would be "shrouded in smoke."

The unfortunate indifference to doctrine noted by Hughes is not a new perception. The 1915 U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* Prize Essay by Lieutenant Commander Dudley W. Knox was entitled "The Role of Doctrine in Naval Warfare." Knox said that "the first and most essential step in the process of so indoctrinating a military service as to ensure co-ordinate action during hostilities is to improvise and formulate a concrete, comprehensive and coherent *conception* of modern war." He went on to say that this task "necessarily involves profound and exhaustive study and analysis of naval campaigns, followed by closely reasoned constructive work. In the absence of genius this can be done properly only by a reflective body of officers, qualified from sea experience and professional study, and also by systematic education and training in the methods of war such as may be acquired at our Naval War College."

The U.S. Navy's current maritime strategy has provided us one conception of future war. There are, of course, others. Wayne Hughes has provided us with the first authoritative text on operational art and U.S. naval tactics in nearly 50 years. From these beginnings perhaps we now can derive the necessary doctrine—not to constrain or inhibit future commanders but to offer a point of departure. Just as the best of chefs must go to a cookbook on

occasion, so future tacticians will have a body of tried and proven recipes to fall back on when their creative genius is stifled by the shock and exhaustion of war.

The author offers some fine points for consideration from which to build. His first and last fundamental maxim is to *Attack Effectively First*. He is apologetic that neither he nor Hugh Nott could find a more elegant turn of phrase. There's nothing wrong with that being the tip of the sword. This also follows closely the conclusion drawn by Admiral and Mrs. Robison fifty years ago, "Naval history shows that the most important tactical maxim is—Attack." Hughes goes on to state that *Scouting* is critical—scouting in its broadest sense to include "reconnaissance, surveillance, and all other means of ascertaining *and reporting* tactical information to a commander and his forces."

Those tenets are further expanded into his five "cornerstones":

1. "Leadership, morale, training, physical and mental conditioning, will power and endurance are the most important elements in warfare."
2. "Doctrine is the companion of good leadership."
3. "To know tactics you must know weapons."
4. "The seat of purpose is on the land."
5. "Attack effectively first."

He lists "The Great Constants" as: Manpower, Firepower, Counterforce, Scouting, C^2 and C^2CM . Then he examines the trends observed, *inter alia*:

- Speeds, range accuracy and lethality of weapons have outstripped the speed, range and ability of ships to counter them.
- Staying power (survivability) has not kept up with weapon lethality.
- Forces today are physically more spread out as an antiscouting measure with C^2 and weapon range used to concentrate firepower.
- Submarines and airplanes were first designed as "scouts"; aircraft vs. aircraft and aircraft vs. submarine battles soon followed. So, scouting from space will lead to battles in space.
- Capabilities in C^2 are hard pressed to keep up with the demands placed upon it.

In his concluding chapter, "Anchorage," the author regrets the sights not seen in this circumnavigation of the tactical world. But no apologies are needed. My father taught me 40 years ago that a piece of rock maple is never split by attacking the heartwood directly, even with the sharpest ax or heaviest maul. You chip away at the outer rings until the center is manageable. Wayne Hughes may not have satisfied himself that all that could have been stated had been published, but he certainly has made the problem easier for future students of the art of naval warfare, as he has gotten them closer to the heartwood.

He surveys other possible trails into the future that are worthy of exploration by those unafraid to choose, in the words of Robert Frost, "the path less traveled by." In the future we, perhaps, will say as did Frost, "and that has made all the difference."