Tactics 101: 007. Combat Multipliers

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***“It is not much the mode of formation as the proper combined use of the different arms which will ensure victory.” Jomini***

Combat Multipliers

When you study military history, you find that the winner of many battles was not the side that had the most tanks or fighting on the ground. In many cases, it was the commander who was better able to utilize the other “toys” he had to play this. In the end it was these other toys that shifted the balance between losing and winning.

In doctrine, another name for these “toys” is combat multipliers. If you want a doctrinal definition, here it is… “Supporting and subsidiary means that significantly increase the relative combat strength (power) of a force while actual force ratios remain constant.” To put it another way, it is those things a commander can use that make his force more lethal and consequently, increases his ability to accomplish his mission. Some examples of combat multipliers include leadership, morale within a unit, surprising or deceiving the enemy, camouflage, electronic warfare, psychological operations, utilizing terrain, smoke, and indirect fire.

Combat support and combat service support are those military branches and functions that rarely, if ever, participate in combat directly or alone but whose presence enhances the ability of the traditional combat units — thus, the name; combat multipliers. It would be hard to imagine Grants advance on Vicksburg without engineer constructed corduroy roads, D-Day without naval gunfire, or Patton’s breakout at St Lo without close air support and artillery preparation. Any of these operations may have succeeded without combat multipliers, but their success was greatly enhanced by their use. It takes engineers to emplace bridges over rivers; it requires artillerymen to reduce enemy strength and get them to keep their heads down; it takes signalers to allow commanders to talk; it takes air defense to prevent enemy air from decimating forces not in contact and so on… War fighting is a team sport and combat multipliers are much like the linemen who clear the way for the running back.

A key concept to understand is that you can acquire combat multipliers or receive the effects of the combat multiplier in a number of ways. First, and obviously the most responsive is to have the multiplier already assigned to your unit. Second, as you go through mission analysis you may determine that you require additional assets to accomplish your mission. Once you have made that determination, you should immediately ask your higher headquarters for use of that asset if they have it available. The key element in this is to request the asset early. As we discussed in earlier articles, resources are scarce and the chances are other units may want the same asset. In that case (in the real world), you must be persuasive with your argument on why you need it and always remember the adage, “the early bird gets the worm!” Finally, on special assets ask your higher headquarters to create the effect of the combat multiplier for you. Of course, the only downfall is that you are depending upon someone other than yourself. Unfortunately, you may get the effect you desire, but not at the time you wanted it.

In this article, we will focus on the use of combat multipliers in a conventional fight. (In future lessons, we will key on how to exploit combat multipliers in urban operations). As you can see from the examples above, things such as leadership and morale are difficult to quantify. This is especially true for those of you who are fighting in a simulation or board game. As realistic as many games are today, it is just impossible to replicate some of these intangibles. Consequently, in this article we will focus on those combat multipliers that are more tangible. Specifically, we will concentrate on the use of 4 critical combat multipliers: lethal indirect fires, smoke, countermobility, and mobility. (Do not fret we will touch upon the other combat multipliers and logistics during the series).

We have broken the article into two parts. In part one, we will look generically at the specified combat multipliers and give recommendations on how you may better employ these in offensive and defensive operations. This is not an exhaustive list, but should be used to jog your brain when finalizing a course of action. In the second part of the article, we will go back to our scenario and ask you to think of ways combat multipliers can assist you in accomplishing your mission.

Employment Considerations

When planning for the employment of combat multipliers you ought to consider PPAR; purpose, priority, allocation, and restrictions.

• **Purpose** – Describe the effect you desire the system to generate. For example you may want smoke to obscure a specific avenue of approach for a specific amount of time.

• **Priority** – Priority defines the priority of effort and / or the priority of support. The best example here is to talk about engineers. They can work on survivability (fighting positions) or counter mobility (obstacles) or mobility (breaches). They may have to divide their efforts among all three with weight given to the most critical effect. Priority also addresses what unit will receive support, when they’ll get it, and when they hand it off to another unit.

• **Allocation** – Combat multipliers are more limited in quantity than are combat assets. There are fewer engineers than infantrymen therefore the commander has to decide who gets them. Each unit might “get a slice” of the capability or the element might work from area to area until they create the desired effect. Close air support is normally allocated in numbers of sorties that will be available to each subunit.

• **Restrictions** – This is where the commander limits how a combat multiplier is to be used. The commander may specify when smoke can be used, when jamming is to be employed, who can call for a scatterable minefield and how long its’ duration can be, or what bridges can and cannot be blown. Restrictions ensure that the current operation does not render the follow on operation impossible to execute.

Before we start, our intention here is to give you some general employment considerations for use of these combat multipliers and some things to ponder. Truly, we could devote countless pages on the art and science of employing each multiplier. We will discuss this art and science in later articles. Hopefully, we will provide some nuggets that will assist you on your “battlefield.”

***“If there is one thing a dogface loves, it is artillery – his own.” Audie Murphy***

Indirect Lethal Fires

In this section, we are focused on those fire support systems designed to execute death and destruction upon the enemy. Indirect lethal fires go hand and hand with maneuver elements, thus the term fire and maneuver. The maneuver commander employs these systems to support his scheme of maneuver, as a means to mass all his available firepower, and to delay, disrupt, and destroy enemy forces in support of his overall plan. Fire support systems include mortars, field artillery pieces, naval gun fire, and air-delivered weapons.

Offensive

• Keep your assets as far forward as possible (not too close that they are in enemy direct fire range) in an attack. This assists in command and control, massing your fires when needed, and exploiting the ranges of your weapons.

• Move your assets within the maneuver of the unit. This ensures that they are there when you need them and provides protection for them. Additionally, moving them on their own can restrict the maneuver and operations of your combat maneuver units. A wayward field artillery battery is not a good thing!

• Remember that CAS stands for Close Air Support. Have an integrated plan so that they can facilitate your maneuver.

• In a movement to contact, distribute your assets throughout your formation. Do not take away your flexibility.

• When deciding if you want to conduct an artillery prep of your objective, you must weigh the potential for destruction (enough significant targets) versus losing the element of surprise.

• When conducting artillery prep, you must quickly exploit the effects of the prep with maneuver. Wait too long and you could have awoken a sleeping giant.

• Mortars (available at the lower levels) are your most responsive asset. However, they are easily detectable by counterbattery radar.

• Whenever you “what if’ your plan, determine how fire support can get you out of trouble.

• Use indirect fires to slow or block any enemy retrograde operations so that you may be able to pursue him.

Defense

• Utilize fire support systems at maximum ranges to neutralize, suppress and destroy your enemy before he gets into your engagement area. This enables you disrupt his plan, interrupt his command and control, and force him to piecemeal his attack.

• Integrate your use of indirect fires with your direct fire systems. They can not stand alone and be successful. Better yet, integrate them with your use of obstacles.

• Ensure you have a plan to utilize fires in support of any maneuver by your counterattack forces or reserve.

• Reduce the effect of your opponent’s artillery by counterfire. A key element in this is protecting your counterfire radar. These radar systems are susceptible to attack and need protection.

• Use fire support to cover areas you may not be able to defend with direct fire systems or to cover gaps in your obstacles.

• Plan indirect fires on, in front, behind and adjacent to any obstacles you emplace. Obviously, the act of raining artillery on your enemy while he is breaching only adds to the chaos!

• Well-placed and timed fires can canalize your opponent (persuade him to go in a certain direction).

• If you must withdraw from your defensive positions, use indirect fires (and smoke) to assist in your maneuver.

• Again, if you must withdraw have fires planned on the positions you just left. Many enemy units (not the good ones) will gravitate to these positions.

• Ensure you have devised a well-thought out and organized fire plan for the counter-reconnaissance fight.

Smoke

The use of smoke upon the battlefield is perhaps the most overlooked and misunderstood of the combat multipliers. Use it right and you have given yourself an excellent advantage. Employ it poorly and you are now the one who is at a disadvantage. The maneuver commander who neglects to utilize smoke in his offensive and defensive planning is making a serious mistake. In order to effectively use smoke on the battlefield takes time and expertise. We will devote a following article to the art and science of smoke employment.

Offensive

• During the breaching of obstacles, the use of smoke can conceal your operations from the enemy.

• The correct use of smoke can assist in achieving tactical surprise. Conversely, the poor use of smoke can immediately alert your foe to your intentions.

• Clever use of smoke can be a critical part of any deception plan. It can direct the enemy’s attention from your main effort.

• Use smoke along your flanks to protect your force.

• Use smoke in the rear of your formation to hide your reserve from the enemy.

• Utilize focused smoke to degrade specific enemy locations or systems right before your attack.

• Use smoke to obscure what you are doing on seized objectives.

• You can use smoke to mark targets or reference points for your forces.

Defense

• Use smoke during your defensive preparation to conceal your defensive positions and your obstacle plan.

• Smoke can isolate enemy formations so they attack your defense in piecemeal.

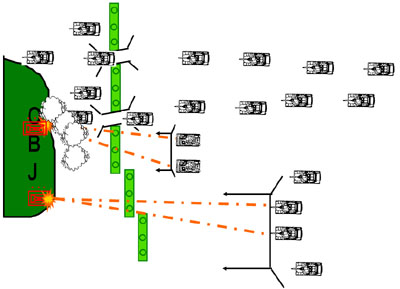
• Well-placed smoke can silhouette enemy vehicles making them lucrative targets as they move through your smoke.

• If you are employing a mobile counterattack force in your defense, smoke can conceal their maneuver from your enemy.

• Smoke can significantly increase the difficulty in your opponent’s ability to synchronize his assets during an attack. At the lower levels, it makes it difficult to keep formations intact.

• Consider the use of smoke on your own obstacles to hinder your foe’s breaching operations.

• In the defense you can use smoke to reduce the effectiveness of directed energy weapons that your enemy may possess.

[](http://www.armchairgeneral.com/wordpress/wp-content/features/tactics101/t101-6alarge.jpg)

***“We need bold and free flight, we need mobility.” Mikhail Frunze***

Mobility

The focus of mobility operations is to preserve the freedom of maneuver for your forces. Mobility seeks to improve movement of maneuver units and its’ combat support and combat service support assets. It accomplishes this by breaching obstacles (manmade and natural) and minefields, and improving or creating maneuver routes. A commander who does not possess mobility can not hope to maintain any momentum in an attack.

Offense

• Mobility assets must be placed far forward to ensure they are available when needed.

• Perhaps, the most difficult operation on the battlefield is to conduct a breaching operation. To be successful, there must be teamwork between maneuver forces and all the combat multipliers.

• Don’t forget to allocate engineer resources to sustain supply routes during the attack. If routes are not sustained, your attack will bog down in short order.

• Remember to consider the mobility of your dismounted infantry. If you are utilizing them to conduct a dismounted attack, they to have to get to the objective.

• One of the ways to move dismounted infantry is through air transport. In order to assist in their mobility, you may have to suppress enemy air defense assets.

• Do not look at breaching or crossing a river as a mission in itself. These are simply means to an end – your final objective. If you focus entirely on the breach or the river, you have not set yourself up for success later.

• Utilize engineers in reconnaissance operations, so they can determine the ability of routes to withstand maneuver traffic.

Defense

• Ensure engineer assets are available for your reserve or counterattack force in the defense. The worst call a commander can receive is from the commander of his reserve or counterattack force, who says he is having difficulty moving into position and does not have engineers with him.

• Preparing a defense relies heavily on receiving logistics and materials from the rear. You must ensure the logistical routes remain open.

• Do not forget to establish some mobility routes (lanes) through your obstacles. Remember your forward recon units will have to fall back at some point. You must have a plan to pass them through your obstacles and then close the obstacle so the enemy can not pass through them.

• If your opponent has the capability to employ chemical weapons, have a plan ready for decontamination. If you do not, this is a sure way to greatly diminish the mobility of any of your units that may receive such an attack

Countermobility

Conversely, countermobility operations aim at denying mobility to your opponent. Countermobility includes construction of obstacles to delay. canalize, disrupt, and kill his opponent and his systems. The maneuver commander utilizes countermobility to increase his target acquisition time and make his direct and indirect fires that much more effective. The use of countermobility also can have a huge psychological impact on an opponent. Do not forget that countermobility operations can be used effectively in the offense.

Offense

• Plan to emplace obstacles during movement. Look for likely places where the enemy can counterattack into your flank. Have assets and materials ready to emplace obstacles if needed. Do not forget the psychological effect a few well-placed mines can have on your enemy.

• Instead of holding claimed ground with many Soldiers, augment a smaller number of personnel with obstacles.

• Artillery delivered minefields is an excellent way to slow or stop an enemy counterattack force.

• Emplace obstacles to contain bypassed enemy units or to prevent them from withdrawing.

Defense

• The old adage, “Cover every obstacle by fire (direct or indirect)’’ is probably a good one to heed!

• You never have enough engineers (and time) in the defense. The wise commander is the one who can prioritize the efforts of his engineers.

• When you emplace an obstacle you must ensure everyone knows where it is. If not, it could very well delay, disrupt or even destroy your own forces.

• If forced to withdraw from a defensive position, consider the use of artillery delivered mines to buy you time.

• Well –positioned minefields can persuade the enemy to go into the engagement area that you want.

• Nothing works better than tying in manmade obstacles with natural terrain obstacles.

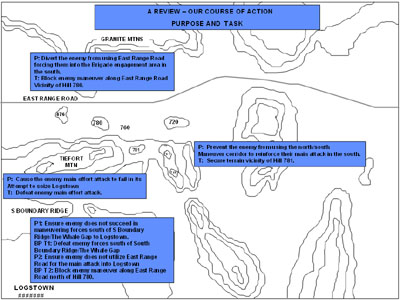
• In order to build obstacles, you must have the materials (mines, wire, pickets, etc). You must have a plan to get them where you need them.

• Place dummy obstacles/minefields far forward of your main engagement area to cause the premature commitment of your enemy’s breaching assets.

• During planning, determine potential landing zone sites the enemy may use for air assault operations. It the probability is high that they will conduct an air assault; you may emplace obstacles in the areas.

Combat Multipliers in use

Okay, it’s your turn! We want you to review the scenario and do a little work. For a little refresher review the articles on purpose and task to get back up to speed. (Below you will find a slide that details the purposes and tasks for our units). After reviewing the scenario and course of action, jot down some potential ways on how indirect lethal fires, smoke, mobility, and countermobility can truly be combat multipliers for you. In a couple of weeks, we will share our recommendations in the [Tactics 101 Forum](http://www.armchairgeneral.com/forums/forumdisplay.php?f=253).

[](http://www.armchairgeneral.com/wordpress/wp-content/features/tactics101/t101-6blarge.jpg)

In summary, the use of combat multipliers has and will continue to be critical on any battlefield or environment. Commanders at any level must be experts on the employment of every combat multiplier. If you are not, you better become so. You can be sure your counterpart on the other side knows how to utilize his combat multipliers!

Next month, we will key in on the use of the reserve. We will discuss why you need one and how and when to employ it. Now get to work and we will talk to you on the forum in a couple of weeks.