

Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations

reviewed by Maj Skip Crawley, USMCR(Ret)

Fleet *Tactics and Naval Operations* by CAPT Wayne P. Hughes Jr. is the Third Edition of his highly regarded book *Fleet Tactics: Theory and Practice*—first published in 1986. Hughes' intent for writing the First Edition of *Fleet Tactics* “was to write a timeless description of fleet tactics, chronicle their evolution, and describe current practices.” I read *Fleet Tactics: Theory and Practice* many years ago. It was an interesting and informative book, and I can attest that CAPT Hughes accomplished his purpose.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Hughes felt “much of the [First Edition] had been influenced by the Cold War threat and a single set of strategic circumstances.” Post-Cold War, “the U.S. Navy was devoted to the projection of power and influence around the world ... at the same time the focus ... was shifting to the coastal regions.” Published in 1999, *Fleet Tactics and Coastal Combat* “reflected both those developments.”

With his Third Edition, *Fleet Tactics: Theory and Practice*, Hughes sets out “to describe the interrelationships of tactics, logistics, and operations in historical campaigns” in order “to make explicit the kinds of refocusing that the U.S. Navy—or any navy—undergoes periodically.” Hughes utilizes historical case studies to inform readers as to what he believes the U.S. Navy needs to do to meet future threats brought on by peer-warfare.

CAPT Hughes has “concluded that in the twenty-first century the fleet's new emphasis should be on gaining

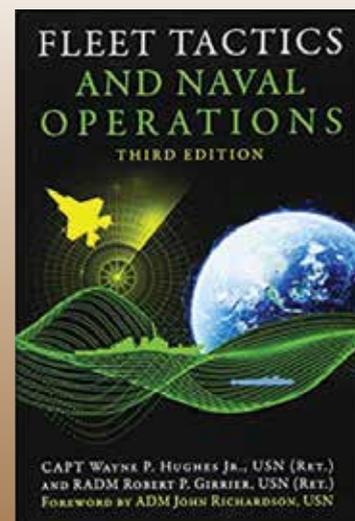
>Maj Crawley is a former Infantry Officer who served during Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM. He is currently the Central Regional Network Coordinator for the Marine for Life Network.

access to and fighting in dangerous littoral waters.” Though CAPT Hughes' last work was published in 2018, *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations* is quite timely given that the essence of EABO is fighting in contested littoral regions.

Why should a Marine officer read a book whose “most important reader ... has always been the American naval officer” and that is focused on using history, historical constants and pres-

... the essence of EABO is fighting in contested littoral regions.

ent-day trends to inform change in the U.S. Navy? First, as “Soldiers of the Sea,” Marines ought to have a working knowledge of the dynamics of naval warfare, which have a tendency to be quite different from ground combat. Second, according to one commentator, “[Gen] Berger got the original idea for *Force Design 2030* from Capt (Ret) Wayne Hughes, author of the classic *Fleet Tactics*.”² We will discuss a few of the great historical constants and present-day trends of maritime



FLEET TACTICS AND NAVAL OPERATIONS. By CAPT Wayne P. Hughes Jr., USN(Ret) and RADM Robert P. Girrier, USN(Ret). Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018.

ISBN: 978-1682473375,
408 pp. \$48.22

warfare to establish a foundation of understanding of some of the dynamics of naval combat. Then we will discuss what CAPT Hughes has to say about littoral warfare and Information Warfare and compare his perspective with what the *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (TM EABO)*³ and *Force Design 2030 (FD2030)*⁴ say concerning these issues.

Constants and Trends

Constants are practices that have not changed over centuries of naval operations and so are not likely to change in the future. *Trends* are developments that have changed in one direction and so are likely to continue in the same direction in future operations.

One historical constant is “there have been far fewer sea battles than land battles throughout history.” Why? The most fundamental reason is that people live on land and the ultimate purpose of navies is to “seek to influence events ashore.” Further-

more, “navies are difficult to replace.” Ships are expensive and take years to build.⁵ Naval combat also has different dynamics than land combat. “At sea the predominance of attrition over maneuver is a theme so basic that it runs throughout this book. Forces at sea are not broken by encirclement; they are broken by destruction.” In the first four months of the Guadalcanal Campaign, two major fleet actions (carrier versus carrier) and at least four separate major surface engagements were fought before the Japanese Navy’s power was broken, and they were forced to evacuate Guadalcanal.

Directly related to the above, is the “decisiveness and destructive nature of naval combat.” During the entire 6-month Guadalcanal Campaign, the U.S. and Japanese both lost 26 major warships, with numerous others severely damaged. “At sea the essence of tactical success has been the first application of effective offensive force,” or to put it more succinctly, “*attack effectively first.*” In the Battle of Midway, the U.S. Navy was outnumbered four to three in carriers. But by some fortuitous circumstances and their own bravery and skills, our naval aviators were able to turn three of the four Japanese carriers into burning hulks in less than ten minutes—prior to our carriers being on the receiving end of a Japanese air attack—and our Navy went on to win a decisive victory. Hughes also points out that many naval battles have a tendency to teeter on the knife edge between victory and defeat before one side wins.

One important trend is the improvement in “scouting effectiveness.” “Until the twentieth century surface raiders and pirates routinely evaded searches for months at a time.” But “aviation enabled ... scouts to cover wide swaths of ocean and report the raiders’ positions by wireless radio. Within a decade, the raiders had all but disappeared.”⁶ Another aspect of scouting is that it “seems to be that there is never enough of it.” A closely related corollary is that many more resources than people think need to be devoted to scouting. At the Battle of Jutland, “Jellicoe committed

25 percent of his heavy firepower to scouting, Scheer allocated almost as much.”⁷ At the beginning of World War II, 50% of a U.S. Navy carrier air group was made up of “dual-purpose scout bombers for tactical reconnaissance.”

Littoral Warfare: “A single, integrated battlespace”

[Littoral Warfare is the] “complicated interaction of land, sea, air, space and cyberspace forces with tactics that crosses boundaries.”

Missile attacks to and from the sea add to the already prevalent strikes by aircraft, *blurring the longstanding tactical distinction between sea and land combat.* The engagements that have been fought for the control of coastal regions have been most effective when land and air forces have acted in concert, using missiles as the principle weapons. [Italics added by reviewer.]

As stated above, CAPT Hughes makes clear that a major purpose of this Third Edition of Fleet Tactics “is to describe littoral combat” and spends a considerable amount of time discussing tactics and operations in contested littoral waters. I believe that the first, and most important thing, to understand about littoral combat, is CAPT Hughes’ contention that “the longstanding tactical distinction between sea and land combat” is essentially gone and the necessity to consider the land and sea portions of a littoral as a single whole. The second most important thing to consider is that just as land and sea need to be thought of as a single whole, one must think of information operations, cyberoperations, space operations and combat operations as a single whole. CAPT Hughes goes so far as to suggest that “Perhaps the navies of the world should no longer refer to naval tactics at all, but instead should think in terms of littoral tactics, which include warships.”

Is CAPT Hughes view consistent with EABO? Definitely.

Modern sensors and weapons range hundreds of miles both seaward and landward, blurring the distinction between operations at sea and on

land and necessitating an operational approach that treats the littorals as a single, integrated battlespace.⁸

CAPT Hughes’ view of littoral combat is consistent with TM EABO. What about Information Warfare?

Information Warfare (IW)

At the most fundamental level, IW is about how to employ and protect the ability to sense, assimilate, decide, communicate and act—while confounding those same processes that support the adversary.

Interestingly enough, in his chapter discussing Information Warfare, CAPT Hughes includes “scouting with unmanned aerial and undersea vehicles,” Artificial Intelligence (AI), cryptography and cyberwarfare, deception and “exploitation of space satellites.” A crucial point CAPT Hughes makes is the shift “from *information* superiority to *decision* superiority. How does one make best use of the avalanche of information available to the operator and commander?” [Italics in the original.]

FD2030 is quite aware of the importance of Information Operations, cyberwarfare and space operations.

We believe that in a conflict with a peer adversary, first moves may be in space and cyber, so we must enable our Stand-in Forces, MEUs, and MEFs to integrate with, and have access to, those capabilities now.⁹

Operations in the Information Environment (OIE) Doctrine. The Service lacks adequate OIE doctrine or training standards. This leads to a lack of awareness, education, and experience often reflected in commanders and staffs grappling with operating in a multi-domain environment and applying and integrating information capabilities ...¹⁰

Conclusion

CAPT Hughes’ *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations* gives readers a larger context to put *EABO/FD2030* in. I found *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations* as interesting and informative as CAPT Hughes’ original *Fleet Tactics: Theory and Practice* and even more timely. Given that *EABO* and *FD2030*

have the Marine Corps operating and fighting in the contested littorals, CAPT Wayne Hughes' *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations* is a must read for anyone interested in the unique dynamics of naval combat; present day trends in naval tactics and technology, and littoral combat. Highly recommended.

Notes

1. CAPT Hughes died in December 2019.
2. West, Owen. "Are the Marines Inventing the Edsel or the Mustang?" *War on the Rocks*, (May 2022), available at <https://warontherocks.com>
3. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, (Washington, DC: 2021).
4. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Force Design 2030 Annual Update*, (Washington, DC: 2022).
5. Compare and contrast. *USS Enterprise*, the Navy's first nuclear powered carrier: Keel laid 1958; launched September 1960; commissioned November 1961; initial operational deployment June 1962; participated in Cuban Missile Crisis October 1962. *USS Ford*: Keel laid in November 2009; christened November 2013; delivered to the Navy May 2017; commissioned July 2017. Has yet to deploy as of May 2022.
6. Coincidentally this reviewer was reading *Bismarck: The Final Days of Germany's Greatest Battleship* while reading *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations*. Consider that in the first two years of World War II the *Kriegsmarine* was able to utilize surface raiders such as the battleship *Bismarck* to attempt to interdict the convoys supplying Great Britain and successfully positioned merchant ships throughout the Atlantic to refuel them. From 1942, onward this ceased due to the increasing effectiveness of aircraft reconnaissance and improved radar.
7. ADM John Jellicoe, C-in-C of the British Grand Fleet and ADM Reinhard Scheer, C-in-C of the German High Seas Fleet.
8. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, (Washington, DC: 2021).
9. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Force Design 2030 Annual Update*, (Washington, DC: 2022).

