



How Ender Wiggin became a MEU commander

by TECOM Warfighting Club

It is 20XX. Your name is Ender Wiggin, and you are a colonel in the Marine Corps. You are competing to command a MEU. It is a tense time. The United States is engaged in great power competition that has seen periodic proxy wars flare up in Africa, South America, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. You spent your career operating as an inside force in the contact layer, conducting missions that signal resolve and create interoperability with strategic partners and allies. You fought against foreign-backed proxies leveraging fifth generation networks, small UAS swarms, and cyber attack tools purchased off the dark web and even, after graduating from the School of Advanced Warfare, made major revisions to war plans. You witnessed the inherent tragedy of war and strive to practice the art of strategy, embracing the old Sun Tzu adage of finding a way to win without fighting.

Commanding a MEU has been your dream since you first set sail as a 1st lieutenant and conducted an air assault. You are one of five finalists and one of two non-combat arms officers competing. Each of you has outstanding fitness reports, prior command experience, and the requisite professional military education. You log into the command screening portal at 0800. The first hour involves an aptitude test that combines psychological evaluations of risk tolerance, intelligence, and creativity, with a test on your understanding of Service and joint doctrine and tactics, as well as current events and key concepts from international relations and diplomatic and military history.

At 0900 the real test begins. You are given two hours to develop a plan to conduct an amphibious operation as part of a larger Joint force. You work through an abbreviated planning process and create a course of action. You then proceed to array your forces according to your plan and fight against an artificial intelligence-based system that modifies its scheme of defense based on your profile and fights using current opposing force doctrine. The better you do, the better the artificial intelligence gets, even presenting you with key judgment windows that evaluate your ability to react to uncertainty, mitigate risk, and seize new opportunities consistent with maneuver warfare philosophy.

The game pushes you to your limits, forcing you to deal with fog, friction, and loss. As you make decisions under pressure, you generate valuable data. The entire game is recorded and accessible by the command board. The Marine Corps even uses the output to further tailor your personalized warfighting adviser, a decision aid that knows your psychology, knowledge base and experiences, and can use the information to help you make better decisions.

In fact, the command screening game data is compared against your previous warfighting skills score—a composite score based on previous tactical and operational decision games and tests you have taken annually since commissioning. The board can see how you have developed overtime and where you score relative to your peers. Equally important, they can compare your scores in decision games where you fight artificial intelligence-opponents versus games where you fight human opponents, giving them a more robust sense of your ability to get inside your adversary's OODA loop and attack their plan.

The war game is intense, but manageable for Marines who are prepared and with operational judgment beyond the baseline requirements. You are a product of a Service that prioritizes selecting leaders based on knowledge and skill. In fact, your generation is the first data-driven cohort in the history of the military profession. Everything about you has been collected analyzed using basic data science techniques and utilized to create tailored teams based on the mission requirements. Where your mother's generation of Marines spent endless hours doing honed, one-size fits all annual training and overly scripted annual field exercises and CPXs, your training and education are tailored and turned into a series of games since you were a raw recruit. From more realistic ranges and live fire exercises to tailored computer games, you spend over 50 percent of your time fighting. Leaders have data on everyone in their unit, including performance metrics and analysis scrapped from social media that helps them see who may be drinking too much or headed into a personal crisis. The data rollout even helped decrease the number of sexual assaults across the Service by over 33 percent in the first year alone.

After you finish the planning process and begin tasking your units, your mind wanders for a moment. You think about what changed in the last twenty years. Leadership selection is no longer about 20th century master brief sheets and who looks the part. You are part of a culture that rewards top performers and transparency. Everyone knows which Marines have the best warfighting scores. It is not uncommon for a young Marine to spend time outside of duty hours practicing and competing in tournaments to fight other platoon leaders across the Marine Corps. As a lieutenant, you remember scoring the highest in your battalion in the urban warfare simulation, demonstrating a keen understanding of how to use small UAS and deal with host-nation forces and displaced populations. When you were a captain, you know you performed poorly in the conventional mechanized

fight against a peer adversary (bottom 50 percent) but were in the top 90 percent of officers when it came to counterinsurgency. You used this information to create a program of self-study and by the time you graduated from command and staff, you were within the top 10 of majors in the Marine Corps in conventional ground operations, putting you in the 99 percent percentile.

That high standing got you invited into a special study program that allowed you to meet top academics, senior military and civilian leaders, in addition to participating in a special study on future concepts. In fact, you are convinced it helped you get battalion command. You know it was not your combat fitness score. You experienced above average declines in physical fitness since injuring your knee in a recreational basketball league. Your personal assistant, a digital career adviser, warned you of the risk and even recommended key diet and exercise changes to limit the risk of injury. Even your commander reinforced these points in your counseling session. Sadly, you did not listen. The only benefit is that the downtime from the knee surgery gave you additional time to improve your warfighting score.

You snap back to the war game. The fight starts. As you shift your initial plan based on key changes in the informational environment and feedback to your commander's critical

information requirements, you start to visualize the complex system. The current fight looks strikingly similar to one of the ten previous simulations you did in the last two months with primary regimental staff as part of your certification for an upcoming deployment. You sense that the enemy is keeping forces back to lure you into a series of seemingly uncontested landing zones. You even bet that there may be hidden sites ashore that could stop your assault with directed energy, electronic attack, and old-fashioned 20th century rockets. Based on the initial reconnaissance, you assess the enemy is preparing a mobile defense. You shift your plan and launch an unmanned amphibious assault while staging a series of strike detachments that allow you, as part of the larger Joint force, to attack-by-fire if the enemy takes the bait and launches their strike force. They do. You destroy the radars on three missile batteries and bulk fuel storage, limiting your enemy's mobility. Your electronic attack plan has blinded enemy sensors. You force larger ground formations to fight blind from static positions before your first unit even lands.



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- General James N. Mattis, USMC (Retired)



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