

TECOM Warfighting Club

Bringing together warfighting communities of interest

by Benjamin M. Jensen

As a Marine you are part of a profession. Any profession requires its members to take ownership. The law requires legal professionals just as healthcare requires physicians who continually research and refine their craft. Our profession is warfighting and strategic competition in support of a constitutional republic. Therefore, we must continually hone that craft and sharpen our judgement through training, education, and deployment.

As the world evolves, a profession must adapt or risk becoming irrelevant. New technology, social norms, and political imperatives alter the law, medicine, and the character of war. As the character of war changes, the military professional must change with it and—just short of the crucible of battle—create training and educational environments that foster a culture of experimentation and rapid innovation. In war, if you are not first, you are last. The question we must ask is, “How can the military professional escape the iron cage of bureaucracy and prepare for the next war? Our answer is simple: *fight.*”

By hosting weekly wargames built around future capabilities and emerging trends in the operational environment, Marines can take ownership of the profession and inculcate a maneuver warfare renaissance for the 21st century. These wargames should be informal, realistic, and used to test prevailing assumptions about how to fight and win the next war. They must force Marines to fight other Marines as well as top military professionals, academics, and business leaders. Increasing the number of sets and reps builds pattern recognition

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and offers an opportunity to explore new approaches to warfare. Marines hone operational judgment through testing their ability to lead future formations from company teams through entire combined joint task forces.

In these fights, the past is sacred but not revered; no concept is off limits.

From prevailing notions about amphibious doctrine and joint forcible entry to the blurred boundary between conventional and unconventional operations, Marines need to cast their net widely and imagine a range of possible futures. They need to anticipate changes in the character of warfare and explore how to



Artificial intelligence and the employment of small UASs is viewed as critical during MEU commander evaluation. (Photo by Sgt Jesus Sepulveda Torres.)

best pull an often reluctant profession into the future.

This article is a story and an invitation. It describes how a group of professionals went about building a fight club for 21st century maneuver and used the insights to push for change in the Marine Corps. In telling this story, we want to invite other military professionals to join.

Something Changed

Over the last four years, many have noticed a disconnect between our experience of war and prevailing approaches in the Service. The current population of officers and SNCOs possess a wealth of combat experience, however, that experience may count for little against a peer threat and in some cases may be counterproductive. Moreover, our future leaders in the officer and SNCO ranks have limited experience planning and conducting major combat operations, expeditionary advance base operations, littoral operations in a contested environment, or ground operations in support of freedom of navigation for the Navy.

In a *Gazette* article titled, “The Officer PME Continuum,” published in 2012, then-Col William F. Mullen III stated, “Can the Marine Corps rely on experience and formal professional military education by themselves to enable professional development?” This question led to the establishment of the Training and Education Command Warfighting Club (TWC) aboard Marine Corps Base Quantico in November 2018. MajGen Mullen, now CG TECOM, established TWC to encourage intellectual ferment, provide a venue for moving ideas forward, and nurture professional development among officers and SNCOs. Specifically, the purpose of TWC is to:

- Move ideas forward to action.
- Provide input or feedback to the institution from “middle management.”
- Create products or outputs that matter.
- Work on issues that matter to *you*.
- Provide trusted peer/subordinate mentorship and networking.
- Foster operational judgement.

Since its establishment in November, TWC has met MajGen Mullen’s intent by recruiting motivated volunteers, re-



Deception planning will be important. (Photo by Sgt Jesus Sepulveda Torres.)

searching and fighting Service-level concepts, and coordinating guest speakers. TWC participants are taking control of the profession through peer mentoring, self-study, and getting outside their comfort zone.

Our Approach: Build a Clock, Don’t Just Tell the Time

The heading above is taken from author Jim Collins book, *Built to Last*, and is a metaphor for building an organization to outlast its leader. As Mr. Collins describes the concept, a time teller refers to a visionary leader who establishes an organization with a thousand helpers, once that leader is gone, the organization fades away or ceases growth. However, changing a culture and establishing solid processes and procedures will build an organization that outlasts the visionary leader.

The TWC is not a new idea, small groups of Marines have been meeting to shape the Marine Corps since 1775. Most notable is the Chowder Society established by then-Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen Alexander A. Vandegrift, following World War II. As described by LtGen Victor H. Krulak in *First to Fight*, the purpose of the Chowder Society was to assist the Commandant in securing statutory protection for the Marine Corps, something it had never possessed. By

making a strong argument for civilian control of the Armed Services to Congress—and stating the case for the Marine Corps—the Chowder Society was able to secure statutory protection for the Marine Corps that included three combat divisions and three air wings. However, the Chowder Society was only established during that particular crisis in Marine Corps history and disbanded soon after the work was completed. Other examples of professional organizations include the Ellis Group and the recently established Brute Krulak Center for Innovation and Creativity.

The TWC is built around a four-step process developed by its charter members: *study, design, learn by fighting, inject*. First, conduct a study where the members collaboratively select a topic and explore it together. These seminar-like sessions involve extensive peer mentoring, external reading, and consultation with outside experts to examine a particular military problem or opportunity for innovation. The group initially selected artificial intelligence and emerging concepts for swarming with small unmanned systems.

The second step, design, involves building wargames based on the results of the independent study and directed research. These wargames serve as a vehicle to form and tests hypotheses about



Marines learn by fighting. (Photo by Cpl Josue Marquez.)

the concepts and capabilities required to achieve a position of advantage in future wars. More importantly, they allow the military professional to see into possible futures and anticipate changes. By routinely fighting with new capabilities and testing different maneuver concepts, Marines hone their operational judgment.

Given a focus on artificial intelligence and swarming, the TWC developed a series of wargames that tests integrating these capabilities in environments defined by existing strategic guidance. Specifically, the current National Defense Strategy (NDS) calls for Services to compete in the contact layer, and if necessary, fight in the blunt and surge layers. Additionally, in developing concepts and capabilities to this end, the NDS pushes the modern military profession to expand the competitive space and seek cost-effective competition mechanisms that help accelerate the rate of adopting new, disruptive capabilities without breaking the bank.

The scenario imagines a forward deployed MAGTF in the Indo-Pacific against a peer threat. Our wargaming approach begins with using a simulation that is programmed with the scenario (e.g., terrain, enemy, and friendly order of battle) and allows us to integrate assumptions about narrow artificial intelligence applications and drone swarm concepts. By using simulation, we are

able to “fight” the concepts numerous times and refine them into tactics, techniques, and procedures. Our initial excursions are focused on intelligence, fires (including electronic warfare and cyber) and maneuver; however, the intent is to branch out into the other warfighting functions. In fact, many of the initial game runs reveal the importance of deception and signature management, as well as the need to increase inventories of key weapons like anti-air and anti-radiation missiles.

The third step of the process, learn by fighting, is the heart of the endeavor. Marines learn by fighting; they fight different formations, to include the enemy, in tailored scenarios to visualize and describe future concepts and capabilities. There are winners and losers. Yet, even in defeat, the military professional learns about new capabilities, recognizes opportunities, and develops operational judgment.

The fourth step of the process, inject, transitions the findings of repeated wargames back into the larger military profession. These injects can take the form of published articles, white papers, or new training standards. They can also evolve into larger service or joint exercise. In fact, low-cost wargame experiments can help senior leaders prioritize their larger future force experiments and make doctrine, organization, training, manpower, leadership, personnel,

and facilities decisions. This model of scoping organizational and capability development through wargaming has its historical roots in the interwar model employed at the Naval War College where the U.S. Navy refined its fleet experiments often based on classroom wargames. If the Marine Corps is going to heed the NDS call to expand the competitive space and innovate in a cost-effective manner, it needs low-cost, scalable wargames.

Way Forward

As stated earlier, this article is an invitation. The TWC needs you! We meet weekly at the MCA&F aboard MCB Quantico, VA. If you are in the area and interested in attending, contact Maj Nathan Dmochowski (nathan.dmochowski@usmc.mil) for more information. We are also exploring a broader digital platform that enables remote participation. Imagine logging into a website, downloading decision games, and posting feedback. In other words, we envision crowdsourcing future concept and capability development while accelerating the rate of adaption by empowering the lowest echelon. We envision bringing the military profession into the 21st century and expanding the dialogue about the evolving character of war across the institution.

We will continue to develop artificial intelligence and drone swarming concepts and tactics, techniques, and procedures in the coming months with participants honing operational judgment while researching, discussing, and fighting Service-level issues. So far, the TWC has brought together a community of interest with volunteers who are motivated to take control of their own professional development and work to better prepare our Service for future combat. We are taking ownership of our profession, come join us!

>Author’s Note: The charter members of the TECOM Warfighting Club are: Col Christopher Woodbridge, USMC (Ret); Dr. Benjamin Jensen; LtCols Scott Cuomo and Roy Draa; Majs Nathan Dmochowski, Lonnie Wilson, Nick Freeman, Jeff Cummings, Scotty Black; and Capt Ryan Steenberge.

