Air Land Sea Application Center

Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Virginia

https://www.alsa.mil

APPLICATION OF ALLIED AIR POWER VERSUS SOVIET OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS

Produced By U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command Air-Land Programs Office

Editor's note: This month's feature article, "Dismantling the Clausewitzian Trinity: How China is Eroding the Means and Will of the United States to Punch Back," shows how the sophisticated strategies of our near-peer competitors are dismantling the vertices of the Clausewitzian Trinity (military, government, people) by clandestine but often legal means. In this month's installment of Blast From the Past, we look back at the work being done by the US Army and Air Force as the force transitioned out of Vietnam and refocused on great power competition (GPC).

In 1978, the US military found itself in a similar position to that of today: the force was recently practiced in war by attrition, characterized largely by low-intensity conflict and operations in the human domain after coming out of Vietnam in 1975. As our military reacquainted itself with what it knew about high-intensity conflict with a near-peer, it faced the question of how to anticipate what new asymmetries the Soviets would bring to new domains. At the time, the domains serving as new platforms for competition included the infosphere, space, and technology. In this issue of "Blast from the Past", you will see that the 1978 Air Land Bulletins give us a glimpse into how the force was thinking about and depicting the Soviet threat.

The graphics that appear below were important to the Services, as they helped reset the force's mindset on high-intensity conflict just as we have reoriented in our preparations for contingency operations on the Korean Peninsula and in response to GPC. Note how the threat pictures in the articles below are high-confidence, simple, and linear,[1] whereas, the new generation of military professionals are deciphering an integrated, irregular threat picture characterized by:

- *artifacts that suggest (not prove) a threat template*

[1] Admittedly, this explanation compares apples and oranges by taking just the tactical side of what was a comprehensive U.S. Cold War strategy, but depicting a tactical fight was a luxury in 1978. Today, we would not use a linear graphic to describe the sophisticated Chinese and Russian strategies that war with us while we are unaware we are in a fight and never intend to engage us tactically.

- *actions that are clandestine, often legal, but have malicious potential*
- *new asymmetries in even more domains (business, cyber, education, etc.) that aim to dismantle US military might without engaging it directly*

Today, as we reduce forces in the Middle East, Southwest Asia, and Africa, we are experiencing both cyclic (more of the same) and novel (unique or wholly new) challenges as we pivot to GPC.

Of course, there is a tendency for each generation to see its challenges as unique. In hindsight, the complicated nature of the near-peer threat in the late 1970s seems elementary compared with the complex strategies we face today. Allowing ourselves to only see the challenge with the tidy benefit of hindsight does not give proper credit to those who have gone before. Uncovering and codifying the Soviet threat was no doubt just as uncertain and daunting as understanding today's threats.

Note: The early Air Land Bulletins were quite succinct. Therefore, we offer an expanded introduction for contextual understanding and provide some discussion on AirLand Battle development's applicability to the current US security situation.

Doctrine Development at Crisis Points

Inefficiencies in inter-Service cooperation have plagued collective US military action throughout our history. However, as battlefields have expanded and warfare has become more interconnected, the necessity to work better together has only increased. Unfortunately, the Services are still plagued by examples of miscommunication or divergent efforts. Understandably, as each Service focuses on conducting high-intensity conflict within its primary domain, there is sometimes a tendency to neglect the interconnectivity required for the joint fight. The US Army and Air Force recognized this in the 1970s while facing off against the Soviet Union, and all of the Services recognize the importance again as we work to address the rising threats posed by Russia and China.

In 1973, US Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Creighton W. Abrams and US Air Force Chief of Staff, Gen. George S. Brown recognized the need to move beyond competing Service interests and, instead, to focus on cooperative battlefield efforts in areas beyond the application of close air support (CAS). As a result of this effort, the newly minted US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), under Gen. William E. DePuy, and the US Air Force Tactical Air Command (TAC), led by Gen. Robert J. Dixon, were directed to work in unison to identify and reduce combat deficiencies.[1] Among other initiatives, the two commands created the Air Land Force Application (ALFA) Center at Langley AFB, VA to coordinate efforts.

During this period, the Soviet Union, bearing its ability to threaten Western Europe, loomed at the forefront of the Defense Department's mind. Of particular concern was the depletion of US combat power following several years of action in Vietnam. This concern, in combination with technological developments in the Soviet Union and the significant force imbalance between the USSR and NATO, created a crisis point for US military doctrine.

Initially, TRADOC focused on an active-defense model for thwarting Soviet forces. This model relied on technological development, improved training, and combined arms effects to counter the lethality of Soviet weaponry and to prevail on a battlefield "where tempo and destruction of material would dramatically surpass that of previous wars." Established as US Army doctrine in the 1976 version of FM 100-5, the concept was criticized by some for its defensive orientation and dependence on firepower and attrition rather than maneuver warfare.[2]

As Gen. Donald A. Starry took command of TRADOC in 1977, he began to reconsider elements of the 1976 doctrine. Having just completed an assignment as the V Corps Commander in Germany, Gen. Starry was particularly interested in the Soviet threat to the Fulda Gap region. As one of three potential main routes for a Soviet advance through Europe, this region was of particular strategic importance. In considering the operational problem, Gen. Starry keyed in on the need to expand beyond the main battle area with a focus on 2nd echelon and deeper targets, limiting Soviet advancement and opening up opportunities for offensive action. The US and our NATO partners would rely on airpower beyond the main battle area to target forces, logistical support, and Soviet command-and-control nodes.

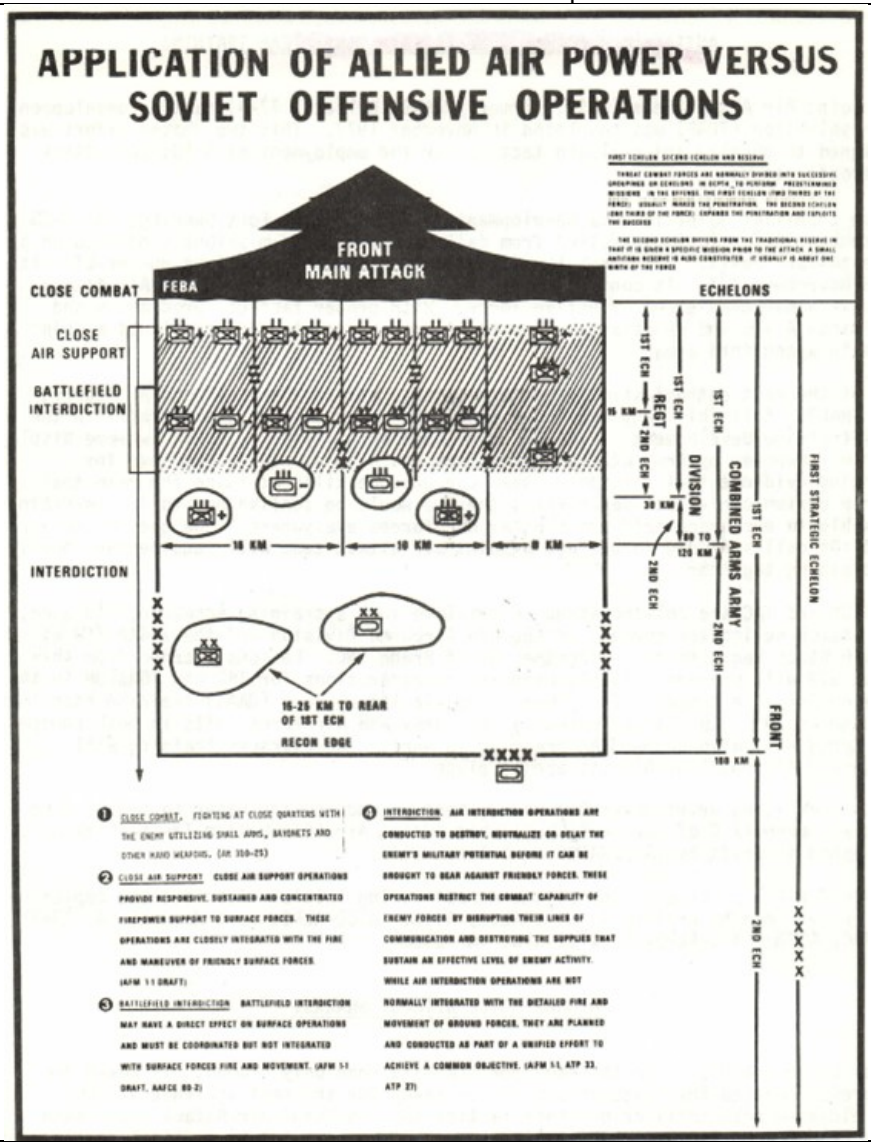
While this may seem a bit elementary today, the air-to-ground integration in the 1970s rested on a foundation of close air support in the main battle area and air interdiction (AI) beyond the battle area—the two battlespaces were separated both in geography and in responsibility. The Army owned the close fight and the Air Force owned the deep fight. However, as the commander of Tactical Air Command, Gen. Wilbur "Bill" Creech, worked with TRADOC to solve this complex problem, the concepts of battlefield air interdiction (BAI) and the fire support coordination line (FSCL) emerged. With the adoption of these two doctrinal initiatives, the battlespace between the Army and Air Force was no longer a solid line of demarcation but, instead, a line that required some level of coordination with the other Service before striking targets (Example: If the Army were to strike targets past the FSCL, it would need to coordinate with the Air Force. For the Air Force, the opposite was true inside the FSCL.). This arrangement provided a codified method to attack enemy forces in the gray area between CAS and AI. In an effort to classify this type of doctrinal solution to an extended, integrated battlefield Gen. Starry chose the term AirLand Battle (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2).

Figure 1. Application of Allied Air Power Versus the Soviet Offensive Operations

HQ TRADOC Air-Land Programs Office has formulated a chart that depicts Soviet echeloning in offensive operations and where Allied air power may be applied. As the accompanying chart portrays, there are a number of first and second echelons in the Soviet scheme of operations. Obviously, Allied air power will be applied to the depth of the battlefield and may include the friendly side of the forward edge of the battle area (FEBA) which is not shown here.

The chart attempts to draw relationships between commonly used air power terms and Soviet offensive deployments to facilitate inter-Service communications. Use of common terms between planners, operators, etc., would enhance precision when communicating.

In the chart definition of close combat, the term *land weapons* was a misprint; it should have been *hand weapons.* Approximately 5,000 copies of the chart have been printed and distributed throughout the Army and Air Force. The documents in parenthesis at the end of each definition are references used to formulate the above statements and are not in all cases direct quotes. †



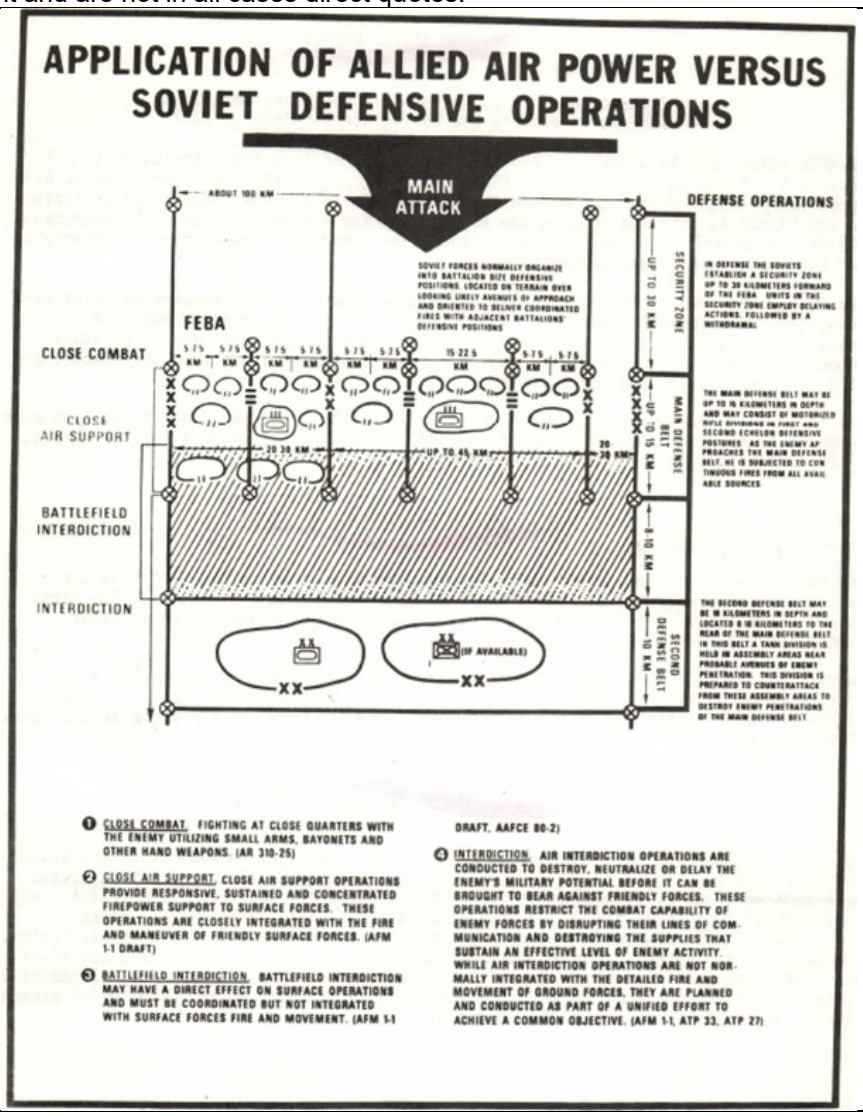
† HQ TRADOC Air Land Programs Office, *TAC-TRADOC ALFA Air Land Bulletin*, (Langley AFB, VA: 1978), Bulletin # 78-2.

Figure 2. Application of Allied Air Power Versus the Soviet Defensive Operations

HQ TRADOC Air-Land Programs Office formulated a chart that depicts Soviet echeloning in defensive belts and where Allied air power may be applied. The accompanying chart portrays two belts, obviously this chart cannot depict all the defensive belts since the Soviets normally defend in depth. As we attack, air power will be used in succession on each belt. We do not anticipate using large amounts of air power to attack forces in the security zone because the Soviets normally deploy small reconnaissance units there.

The chart attempts to draw a relationship between commonly used air power terms and Soviet defensive deployment to facilitate inter-Service communications. Use of common terms and areas of application would enhance precision when communicating.

Approximately 5,000 copies of this chart have been printed and distributed throughout the Army and Air Force. The documents in parenthesis at the end of each definition are references used to formulate the above statement and are not in all cases direct quotes. [Δ]



[Δ] HQ TRADOC Air Land Programs Office, *TAC-TRADOC ALFA Air Land Bulletin*, (Langley AFB, VA: 1978), Bulletin # 78-3.

Interestingly, while the concept of AirLand Battle and its requisite components of CAS, BAI, and AI were codified in both US Army and US Air Force doctrine in the 1980s, and firmly entrenched in mindsets of NATO and USEUCOM ground forces, the concept did not survive the planning process for Operation Desert Storm. Contrary to established doctrine, Lt Gen Chuck Horner, the USCENTCOM Joint Forces Air Component Commander for Desert Storm, preferred a method he referred to as "push CAS." This approach, approved by USCENTCOM Commander Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, was exercised just prior to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and featured prominently in the eventual plan to expel Saddam Hussein's forces from the country. In it, the concept of BAI did not exist. Instead, CAS occurred inside the FSCL and AI outside the FSCL.[3]

Doctrinal disagreements aside, the AirLand Battle concept marked a turning point in US Army/Air Force relations. While not fully accepted in either Service, the concept broadly recognized the need for persistent attack throughout the depth of the battlefield. Neither the Army nor the Air Force could win a major conflict independently, and peer/near-peer adversaries necessitated close coordination between ground and air to build synergy of action. Sadly, it took a threat scenario that pitted overwhelming enemy strength against US/NATO forces for the two Services to recognize and then act to mitigate the rivalries that had eroded previous collective action.

Arguably, contemporary US forces face yet another crisis point. As anti-access/area denial platforms proliferate and counter-state gray zone operations become the norm, the new battlespace dwarfs the "extended" battlefield of the 1980s. Ongoing cyberspace operations and ostensibly innocuous business/diplomatic efforts both project enemy power beyond the traditional battlefield and curtail the relative strength of US regional forces. By taking the "fight" outside of the traditional military environment, our adversaries take advantage of cultural seams that exist between the military, government, and business to expand a form of economic colonialism—a practice that increases global influence external to the traditional Westphalian state system. As US forces battle the tyranny of distance to project force into regions of conflict, nation-states like Russia and China complicate the strategic problem with expansive defensive systems that seek to inhibit US maneuver while increasing the costs of action—essentially returning military conflict to the days of stationary defenses and attrition warfare.

For the United States, the crisis point of the 2020s is the inverse that it faced in the 1980s with the same relative force disposition. Now, instead of facing off defensively against the Soviet Union with the hope of creating small pockets for offensive action, the United States faces near-peer adversaries capable of taking offensive actions and then defending in force with a credible active defense. Such a strategy perfectly complements a nation with short supply lines, defense in depth, and a substantially larger force structure (regionally if not globally). The relative size of the adversary force and the defensive nature makes global near-peers into regional peers. Interestingly, while the current scenarios seem more precarious than the Fulda Gap problem of the 1980s, the solution is largely the same—the US military must work better together.

Some of this realization is evident in the contemporary support for the joint, all-domain command and control (JADC2) initiative. In a world inundated with data, the nation that is able to best synthesize and act upon relevant information is more likely to

prevail in conflict. For the United States, this is especially important as most power projection will necessitate long supply lines and, potentially, a smaller on-site force structure. Of course, this battlespace equation has two components. The first is gathering information for decision, and the second is expeditiously acting on a decision to create effects across the battlespace.

As an organization, ALSA focuses on multi-Service interoperability. Through multi-Service tactics, techniques, and procedures publications; academic journal articles; media presence; and inter-Service networking, ALSA attempts to break down the same cultural barriers that Generals Starry and Creech tried to eradicate in the 1980s. By providing a common language for inter-Service cooperation, ALSA encourages interoperability in the battlespace. From the perspective of JADC2, while joint and Service doctrine centers strive to coalesce data and speed decision making, ALSA works the equation from the opposite side by breaking down Service barriers and speeding execution.

Disclaimer. The opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied within are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any other agency of the Federal Government.

---

[1] Robert J. Dixon, "TAC-TRADOC Dialogue," *Strategic Review*, Winter 1978, 45-54.

[2] John L. Romjue, "The Evolution of the AirLand Battle Concept", *Air University Review*, May-Jun 1984.

[3] Lt Col Terrance J. McCaffrey III, *What Happened to Battlefield Air Interdiction: Army and Air Force Battlefield Doctrine from Pre-Desert Storm to 2001*, (Maxwell AFB: Air University Press, 2004), 16-39.