

# From Home Guard to Space Force

## The Crucial Need for Auftragstaktik at Higher Command

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### Resumé

Begreppet uppdragstaktik omtalas ständigt med lovord efter de preussiska och tyska framgångarna tidigare i historien för att sedan bli etablerade i doktrinpublikationer. Denna artikel undersöker implementeringen av uppdragstaktiken i Sverige och USA med betoning på högre officersnivån utifrån olika försvarsgrenar. Resultaten visar hur avsaknaden av en djupare kulturell applikation är den gemensamma röda tråden. Något som betonas ytterligare via två amerikanska fallstudier, trots flera tidsåldrar emellan tyder båda på hur dysfunktionell kultur omöjliggör uppkomsten av uppdragstaktik. Artikeln avslutas med ett perspektiv från hemvärnet och slutligen den amerikanska rymdstyrkans förutsättningar för uppdragstaktik i en värld som alltmer präglas av teknikutveckling och gråzonsproblematik.

AT THE TIME of writing, a Russian invasion of Ukraine has transformed from prospect into reality, ushering in a world with actual war breaking out in Europe. With it fears for further escalations that are now on levels akin to the Cold War. This seemingly regional conflict exhibits vital implications as part of the Great Power Competition (GPC) and the lengthy ongoing changes expanding on how to wage modern warfare on a global scale. More specifically in light of the grey zone, or non-linear warfare, that the Russian military thinking summarises as part the new generation of warfare. One typically characterized by using asymmetrical means towards subverting the willpower of an opponent and destroying their economy, essentially approaches starkly opposed to solely relying on crushing their armed forces.<sup>1</sup> Developments certainly recognised by Sweden, most recently by launching its Psychological Defence Agency.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps above all, the emphasis is increasingly concentrated on the role of information

warfare and the pursuit of technology with the inclusion of cyber and now the space domain.<sup>3</sup> The role of artificially intelligent weapons is also undoubtedly increasingly gaining ground as a paradigm shift likened to how gunpowder or nuclear weapons once transformed the military. It is prompting questions of what role increased usage of autonomous weapons,<sup>4</sup> application of artificial intelligence/machine learning and Internet of Things will play in the grand scheme.<sup>5</sup> It is further constituting a battlefield where very weapon has the sensors of a smart phone that communicate with each other.

It is in this vast context that we cannot allow ourselves to overlook the importance of Auftragstaktik, as its already fraught development will now be facing an even more multifaceted approach to warfare. Where perhaps its approach and values are required more than ever in order to navigate the increasing complexity of a world with conflicts taking place in cyber, information and increasingly even the space domain; all point-

ing towards the predisposition for adaptability.<sup>6</sup> This article will seek to explicate the notion of *Auftragstaktik* while highlighting its present day meaning, why its cultural application is difficult and more importantly, why it is still necessary in the contemporary world. Employing case studies and experiences alike in an attempt to get to the heart of the matter: Can we learn from the past to prepare for the future? The article will focus on the higher command level and the importance of culture that in turn fosters trust. Though many translations and variations of the elusive concept exist, hereafter we will refer to it by *Auftragstaktik*.

## What is and is not *Auftragstaktik*

[...] an unusual desire for freedom from above and a desire for responsibility, unlike any other army, has developed [in the Prussian Army] [...] We allow [...] the ingenuity of the individual full measure, hold the reins more loosely, and support every success [...]

– Prince Frederick of Prussia in 1860.<sup>7</sup>

Mission tactics to name just one of many translations, is a broad concept encompassing many aspects of war.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, “it is not a Command-and-Control doctrine. It is not a Command-and-Control system. It is not a technology. It is not a ticket to a “free for all.” It is not a way to write short or no orders or to rely on verbal orders.”<sup>9</sup> It is with these axioms that Vandergriff begins to define one of the key tenants behind the Prussian, and later German, military successes, that is to say the auspicious concept they dubbed *Auftragstaktik*. At its core, it is an enabler for manoeuvre warfare and combating numerically superior enemies alike. However, there is a crucial need for a discussion on what

it actually is and more importantly; how it is effectively implemented. Above all else is possibly the insight that *Auftragstaktik* is a cultural philosophy, rendering the highest form of military professionalism.

This formula begins with a serviceman thrust through a rigorous selection process and training, all in order to be empowered with the trust that is required in exercising latitude in the accomplishment of a mission. This has proven hard to export,<sup>10</sup> certainly not helped by the translations indicating a certain style of giving orders or phrasing them, as its implementation requires a completely holistic approach in everything the military does; encompassing all education, training and even aspects of the “garrison life”.<sup>11</sup>

This paper will now proceed as follows: first a successful case of German application will be presented followed by a discussion on the ongoing debate for contemporary application. Next two cases will be studied that while set in different centuries, share the distinct characteristics of distrust between commanders instigating failure. This will be followed by a perspective of the current Swedish reality through the Home Guard and finally an insight into the development of the U.S. Space Force.

The case study of the 11th Panzer Division during the Chir River battles 7–19 December 1942 provides an illustrative example of its application by enabling successful counter attacks in an otherwise defensive battle. To provide a brief summary, Generalmajor Hermann Balck would take the initiative away from the Soviets, moving from defensive with offensive reaction by responding quickly. The commander would not only seek to be as close to the frontline as possible, but often end up at the anticipated crux (*Schwerpunkt*) when not directly visiting each regimental commander in person.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the combination of a small staff and senior

commanders at the frontline meant that often only a very junior officer would remain at the command post to pass orders along, demonstrating the importance for mutual trust across multiple levels and eagerness to take charge.<sup>13</sup>

Balck's personal presence would not only provide a much-needed morale boost for the troops but also enable the most experienced man to make the most critical decision swiftly while relying on his own sense as opposed to second hand account.<sup>14</sup> His division triumphed by fighting in an excellent series of "fire brigade" actions against the numerically superior Soviet forces. The German tanks would race from one end of the Corps' sector to the other, while using the relative calm of the night to plan and move for the next morning, as they engaged Soviet units that managed to break through the line.<sup>15</sup> This achieved remarkable success, as one key engagement would annihilate a large portion of an entire Red Army Tank Corps, attained through creating order from chaos in a fashion far away from a choreographed battle plan. In contrast to constraints associated with phase lines directed by staff officers removed from the actual battlefield, it derived from a subordinate commander seizing an opportunity facilitated through short orders not specifying where, when or how to fight the enemy<sup>16</sup>

The commander saw a unique opportunity and supported by his confidence in himself and his soldiers, he rose to the occasion. He also had confidence in his superiors, that they would support his unorthodox decision to fall in behind the Russian tanks. This attitude stems from the education of the officers, especially the fostering of initiative. [...] These concepts are the cornerstones of *Auftragstaktik*.<sup>17</sup>

The messages and orders, consistently characterized as short, supplied the division

command post with information required to do its job while they in turn did not interfere with the exception of diverting forces to aid the collapsing left flank of the 336th Infantry Division.<sup>18</sup>

This result raises the vital question of how was it achieved? Key to this are the two aspects of successfully operating mentally faster, more specifically in terms of decisive decision-making, and the military force culture that was cultivated. What this meant was not only encouragement of initiative taking and taking advantage of fleeting opportunities instead of waiting for full information, it more than anything involved fostering leadership on all levels and ingraining the aspect for officers to enjoy responsibility on all levels.<sup>19</sup>

Why is it important for an officer to enjoy responsibility? Independence equips an officer to handle uncertainty and make good decisions in the absence of direction. When faced with the horrors of the battlefield, an officer needs more than just independence to reach his or her potential. When everything is difficult and everyone around him seems to have given up, that is when the feeling of responsibility kicks in. It is the feeling that no one else can determine the outcome of the engagement, when one must face the emptiness of the battlefield.<sup>20</sup>

There is a depth to the application here, perhaps best perceived through the term *Selbständigkeit* (to change an order) that covers the German discussions rather than that of *Auftragstaktik*. It essentially justifies a subordinate commander to change orders based on circumstances when faced with an opportunity and/or cut off from communication with higher command; designating inaction as the carnal sin, waiting for the perfect information and losing an opportunity was simply not tolerated. Advocating a military professionalism of individual in-

initiative and freedom in all things: trusting in the knowledge, independence and joy in taking responsibility.<sup>21</sup> Underpinning the need to understand the reasoning, as in the larger picture behind the assignment of why are we guarding the bridge and can it be destroyed or not. There is much more to be said, yet for this article we must settle with the idea of the rooted cultural core and its role essential role as the foundation.

## Previous contributions to the debate

Various other military forces have in the past and continue to this day in attempting to implement Auftragstaktik following the evident German successes. Yet while some are successful, more often these endeavours end up paying lip service while failing to genuinely implement it. With the lack of cultural application in common, authors from Sweden and the U.S. have been chosen to constitute this literature review. In the Swedish case, it leads to the conceptualization a “*paper tiger*” as Palmquist frames it due to failure in delivering the desired effects. Although the military Swedish strategy doctrine from 2016 (MSD 16)<sup>22</sup> explicitly states that Auftragstaktik is to lay the foundation for the way to lead, the reality differs greatly.<sup>23</sup> Neretnieks contributes to the debate with a plethora of brilliant and insightful points; arguing against detailed orders, understanding the purpose of the mission and line of thinking several levels above your own.

Particularly striking is how Sweden, alongside Israel, has been an early proponent for Auftragstaktik.<sup>24</sup> As early as in the beginning of the 20th century Sweden already began embracing the inferiors’ force multiplier, characterized as offensive in action while perceiving combat as a series of unforeseeable

events to be exploited using quick decision, initiative and good leadership. He further concludes by defining culture as the decisive factor for realising Auftragstaktik, separating it from the notion of it being a method as a whole-of-organizational approach is required.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, all these authors ascribe to this conclusion as a common thread yet still the damning observation remains that

The Swedish Model of today is a pale copy of the original. It stands in several respects for the opposite to it. It obviously does not deliver the same effects either. It lacks claw and bite. It is a paper tiger.<sup>26</sup>

In an update during 2021, Palmqvist would remain pessimistic on how the Swedish Doctrine for Joint Operations (DGO 20)<sup>27</sup> remains heavily bogged down in method, with checklists giving the misperception of events as predetermined, rendering them counter-productive in the pursuit of Auftragstaktik.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, other authors would instead opt to examine the role of technology and delve deeper into the cultural aspect, asking whether our democratic values aid or hamper Auftragstaktik.<sup>29</sup> It is in light of these contributions to the discussion that Neretnieks is hopeful for the future as the voices echoing the value of cultural application are increasing. Younger comrades use modern technology along with simplified staff procedures and changed organization to strengthen the officer corps’ initiative and decision-making – the very things that underpinned the German effort.<sup>30</sup> It is therefore important that the technological aspect, with its rapid development, does not seek to replace these values. With the assumption of the future characterized by more precise weapons and faster paced combat, the espoused values of individual initiative and proximity to the action becomes more vital than ever before.<sup>31</sup>

The necessity for speed and methods of manoeuvre warfare tend to promote the notion that Auftragstaktik best benefits smaller units and as such scales in difficulty along with the size, furthermore with different results depending on what and where it is applied.<sup>32</sup> A notion particularly embraced by Hanson, recently arguing for The United States Marine Corps (USMC) to get back to Auftragstaktik. He reverberates many of the Swedish authors by remarking “*a significant contradiction currently exists between what our Corps practises and what it preaches*”<sup>33</sup> or risk being outmanoeuvred by a bolder opponent in a world increasingly characterized by the Great Power Competition (GPC). He further details how today the Marine Corps embraces the ideals of initiative only to practically halt subordinate leaders before they achieve the desired effect – removing the important component of confidence in higher leadership supporting their actions. Even more devastatingly, the wide distribution of lightweight portable radios among small units across a wide battlespace would rather than coordinating instead lead to “an overwhelmed command node that attempts to alleviate its uncertainty by demanding even more information which only strains itself more and saps tempo through a form of paralysis by analysis in the process. The ultimate result is very often clogged lines of communications, slow orientation on situations, late decisions, and missed opportunities.”<sup>34</sup>

The result is waiting for orders in a battlefield with communication increasingly characterized as degraded and denied. Modern warfare requires the Marine Corps to follow its own doctrine perhaps more so than ever before. This is imperative against electronic warfare and its ability to overload, jam or otherwise deafen the other side’s radar and radio. All the more so when further blurred

in combination with cyber-offence and psychological operations.<sup>35</sup>

This problematic is nowhere near exclusive to the Marine Corps but rather affects the U.S. Military as a whole and cannot simply be solved with a hyper-decentralized command. Lythgoe argues that in order to excel at combat, mission command ultimately needs to bridge the gap between doctrine and operational context, resolving the tension between centralization and decentralization in a dynamic approach, resulting in what he titles as an iterative approach, allowing forces to amass on decisive points while remaining equally capable of sizing fleeting opportunities.<sup>36</sup> He further strengthens this approach by using Moltke’s dialectic<sup>37</sup> in arguing for the importance of higher level planning to provide the lower level with favourable conditions while their actions in turn drive higher level planning and subsequently form an important interaction between the levels of war.<sup>38</sup> He presents the opposite fear of Hanson and essentially arguing for “a continual cycle of synchronization, dissemination, initiative, and reporting is the most promising way ahead for mission command.”<sup>39</sup>

He is not the only voice to argue for a shared understanding of mission command. Matzenbacher, to provide just one of many additional voices, argued along distinctly similar lines in 2015 following his clear conviction that the U.S. Army has failed to change its culture. Eerily similar to the Swedish situation, the general consensus seems to be that it is not enough to write a doctrine but rather a forceful change is necessary to truly change basic assumptions and culture, something that an existing service, such as the Army, is unwilling to do, resulting in Auftragstaktik as a merely espoused leadership philosophy and detached from practise.<sup>40</sup> Thomas X. Hammes, in his role

as military educator, describes the need for the dynamic approaches “As usual the Army initially made it very formalistic and complex. [...] The key is to get the students to understand these are interactively complex or wicked problems and will not respond to a linear system with an ”end state” We really need to get rid of the idea of an end state”<sup>41</sup>

## The timeless challenge of battle command

Pope is a fool, McDowell is a rascal and Halleck has brains but not independence.

– Fitz J. Porter, US, Manassas (2nd)<sup>42</sup>

The maxims of “no plan survives contact with the enemy” and “plans are useless, but planning is indispensable” have both doubtlessly become something of old military chestnuts, yet there is a lack of an equivalent concerning how a commander modifies a plan. Even more so under circumstances that do not permit the formal command and staff actions associated with deliberate planning. In 1997, a U.S. Colonel with Swedish roots by the name of Adolph Carlson argued in a competition-winning paper for “how the pressure of ongoing operations involves a fundamentally different mental process than planning in advance of operations”.<sup>43</sup> All the more so with the additions of the most demanding conditions and time constraints effectively rendering consultation among various command structures diminished; at worst even rendering conceptual divergences between senior and subordinate commanders. More fascinatingly, his two case studies illustrate that information technology has yet to offer solutions for this sort of top-down centralized approach. A conclusion that still holds significant relevance today. The reasoning behind the inclusion of Carlson for this paper is that the cases exhibit a distrust

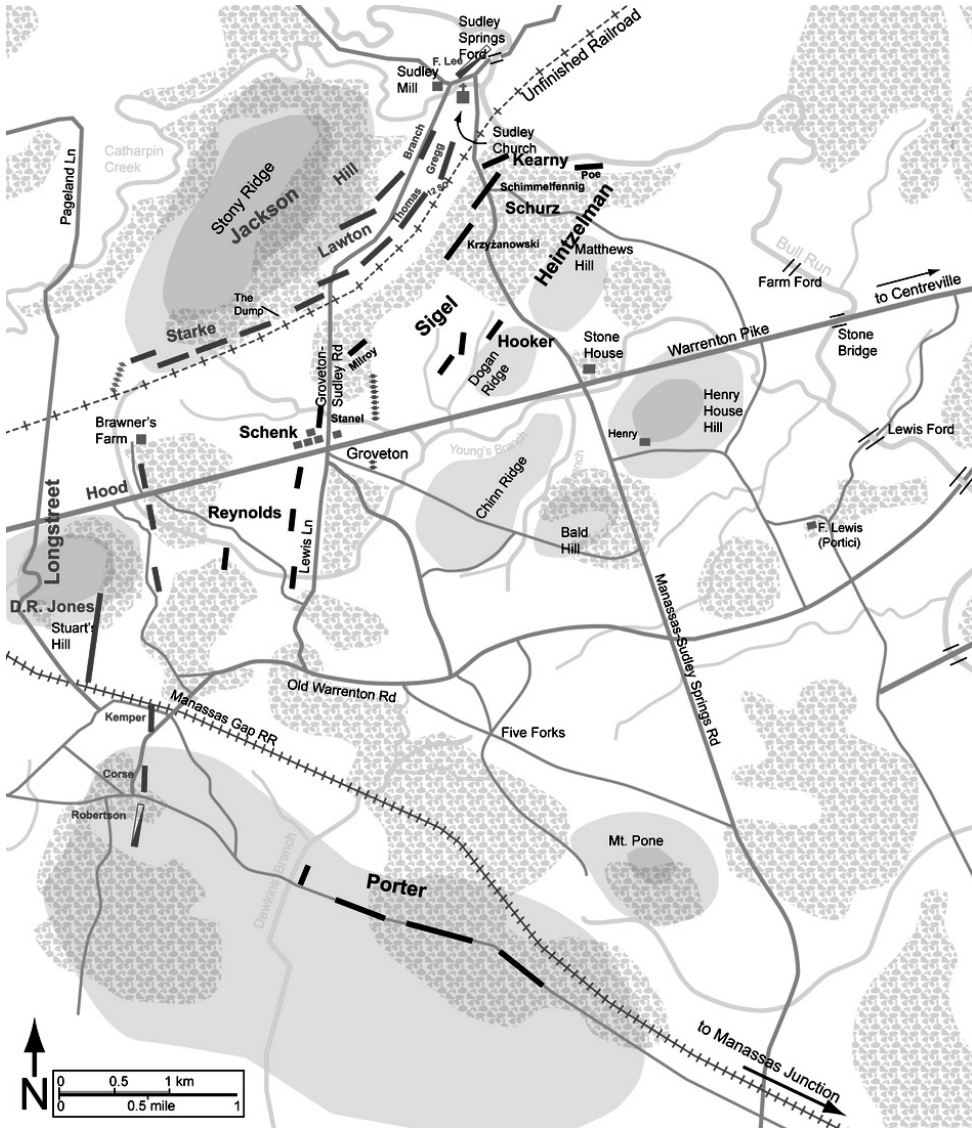
across a long-time span that ultimately renders any notion of Auftragstaktik application virtually impossible.

The two presented cases are clearly at odds in more than just time period yet share the distinct commonality of ultimately illustrating the same problematic. The first case is set during 1862 concerning Fitz John Porter, late Major General of Volunteers, for his decision-making or rather inaction during the Second Battle of Manassas, part of the American Civil War.<sup>44</sup> At the time, Porter commanded the Army of Potomac’s V Corps, attached to Major General John Pope’s Army of Virginia. Porter would face court martial for the indictment of not moving his corps in accordance to orders and subsequently failing to attack Confederate General Jackson’s forces, a move that supposedly could have prevented the Union defeat.<sup>45</sup> The defence however argued that Pope’s orders were simply not possible to execute, owing to an inaccurate picture of the road and enemy disposition alike. This claim was further collaborated by a dispatch provided at the trial, from Union Cavalry, confirming how the concentrated forces of another Confederate force, led by General Longstreet, were in front of Porter. Resulting in any attack on General Jackson’s forces ultimately faced no other choice but breaking through General Longstreet’s forces first.

Despite the flimsiness of the case and its unmistakable shroud of political strife, Porter would still end up convicted as an attractive scapegoat<sup>46</sup> and wage a journey for more than two decades in attaining his definitive vindication. A process that surprisingly involved a new review that took advantage of a rare opportunity in military matters, the questioning of ex-Confederate officers that participated in the actual battle. These veterans, from the standpoint of fighting Porter, held him in high regard as a commander<sup>47</sup>

and considered it a great boon during the war when the Union dismissed him from the battlefield.<sup>48</sup> Even more remarkable was the participation of General Longstreet himself, who revealed that by the time Porter received orders, his Confederate troops were present in strength. In addition, not only prepared to break the attack, but also perfectly willing and able to fully commit to pur-

suit. In essence, he testified that the actions of Porter, by maintaining his position, had instead prevented him from joining forces with Jackson and thus thereby averting an even greater catastrophe on the 29th of August than the one that actually occurred on the 30th. Further remarking how rather than reproach, Porter's admirable actions merited his commander's gratitude.<sup>49</sup>



One might be tempted to view the case of General Porter and warfare at the time as trappings of an old age, one characterized by poor communication and inefficient information management. Riddled with faults easily remedied by modern technology, with innovations such as space-based position locating systems enabling near real-time battlefield information. That is where the second case of General Fredrick Franks, set during the four days of Desert Storm's ground operations in February 1991, would contend that we ought to reconsider such hasty conclusions. Carlson arranges the scene by describing the operation as initially wrapped up as a remarkably successful military operation, only to one year later be bizarrely unwrapped with the revelation to have been fragmented by disputes within the theater command structure. These disputes, as presented by the *Army Times* writer Tom Donnelly, concerned how ground battle should be waged, primarily emanated from the Theater Commander, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, and his land force subordinates.

Frederick Franks, Commander of VII Corps, would end up taking the brunt of Schwarzkopf's frustration as he was "not aggressive enough in attacking Iraq's Republican Guard". This censure would continue even after the war as Schwarzkopf would, in his October 1992 autobiography, describe Franks' plan as "plodding and overly cautious" in hampering VII Corps' advance compared to other units in the attack. Schwarzkopf would eventually tone down his criticism and admit he had been "too hard" on VII Corps' "slow progress during the battle" and acknowledge that Franks had been "faced with the challenge of accomplishing [the] mission while sparing the lives of as many of his troops as possible". However, this concession did not stop others from continuing on corresponding line

of thought, some going as far as suggesting the rate of events was too much for Franks and "dinosaur blood runs freely through his veins". Carlson however subscribes to a different interpretation, one advocated by retired Marine Lt. Gen. Bernard Trainor, describing Franks as well respected in the Army yet also known to be slow and deliberate in all that he did. In other words, not the type of leader Schwarzkopf was looking for in the spearhead against the Iraqis. The focal point of recognising that the root of the problem includes a myriad of complex factors, such as different war cultures and leadership styles; creating an issue that remains ever present in the Information Age.

These two cases, of Porter and Franks, were selected by Carlson to illustrate how "an organization's warfighting culture will shape a subordinate commander's evaluation of information and interpretation of direction".<sup>51</sup> An aspect that even affects units that find themselves detached from one organization and placed under the operational control of another, emphasising how the warfighting culture of its parent command will remain. Aspects such as these are bound to affect appraisal of enemy capabilities, mission analysis and appreciation for ambient conditions. Deconstructing the details of cases along these characteristics reveal valuable lessons, beginning with how the missions of both the Army of Virginia and Central Command faced geographic information and enemy-oriented objectives.

The appraisals of enemy capabilities in both cases were further inconsistent between the corps level and theater commander. Pope would be under the impression that Jackson was fleeing for his life, pursuing him aggressively in a grandiose tone of disregarding notions of holding strong positions, and instead favour bolder actions over caution. Pope did not realize it, but his actions were



exactly what the Confederates hoped. Porter would however base his decisions on the report from the Union cavalry that specified how over 14,000 Confederates had passed through the Thoroughfare Gap while Pope on the other hand denied seeing this piece of intelligence until 1900 hours that evening.

Eerily similar, Schwarzkopf would view the enemy as collapsed, effectively on a general rout and contemptuously say, "The enemy is not worth shit [sic]. Go after them with audacity, shock action and surprise." A perception that differed from Franks, as he interpreted not panic but possibility of concentrating for offensive action. Appraising the intelligence of facing five heavy Republican Guard Forces Command divisions, described as the best-equipped and trained force in the Iraqi ground forces with characteristics as highly motivated and skilled offensively. The key difference here is how Schwarzkopf and Pope both relied on remote sources for decision-making, such as intercepted messages and technical surveillance, in clear contrast to how Franks depended on battlefield data with the belief it portrayed the situation with greater fidelity. Carlson emphasises further how "non-contextual electronic data tracking vehicular movements presented no coherent, persuasive grounds to expect that the anticipated meeting engagement would be anything less than originally anticipated"<sup>52</sup>

The orders and the manner of their issuing is also worth considering, as the direction in both cases also bears resemblance. Porter can hardly be blamed for failing to interpret the vague order from Pope "move forward [...] towards Gainesville. [...] as soon as communication is established [...] the whole command shall halt. It may be necessary to fall back behind Bull Run [...] tonight."<sup>53</sup> This point is further emphasised by the ambient conditions, as Porter was, on top of everything else, unable to follow

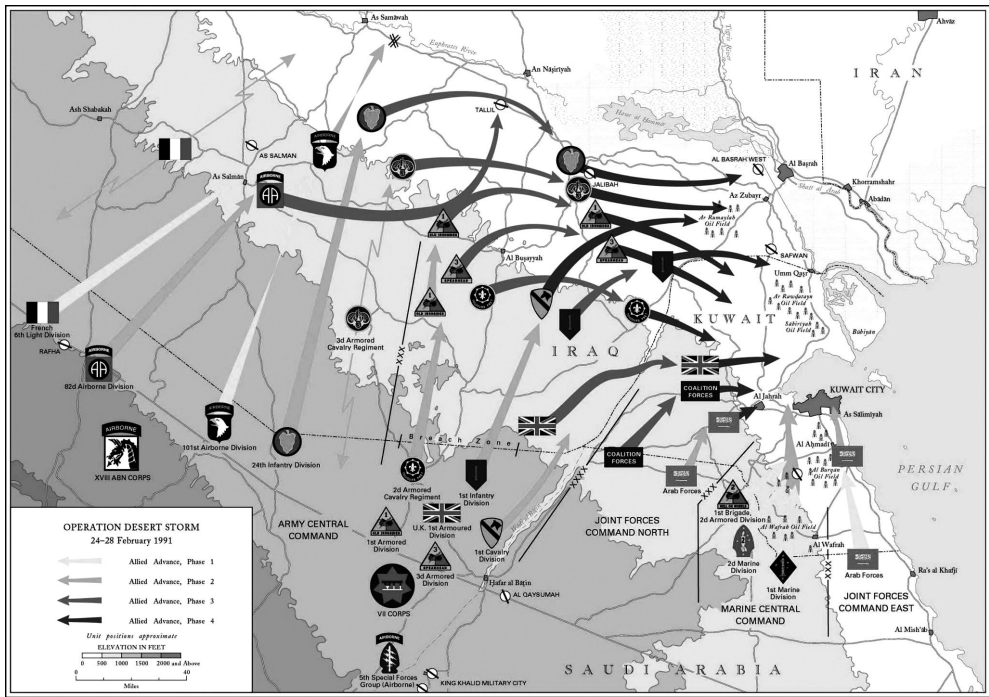
the order to the letter. Pope had ordered a night march while failing to appreciate that the road was too narrow, destroyed bridges and finally two to three thousand Union Army wagons blocking the way.

Schwarzkopf's anger at what he perceived as Franks' failure in making good progress during the night suggests that, like Pope, he was unable to envision the predicament his subordinate found himself facing. With this war additionally titled as the First Information (or Space) War,<sup>54</sup> Schwarzkopf and his staff would exercise a wide span of control over the U.S. and coalition forces through computer graphic displays of information, albeit abridged. Carlson argues that these displays were ultimately detrimental, as Schwarzkopf would only absorb specific components of the operation. All the more so in the area of the main attack, his map was limited to displaying movement and he was thus inclined to think that lack of movement equated a lack of progress. As illustrated by the inability "to appreciate the difficulties of 1st Infantry Division's consolidating a breachhead, the passage of 7,000 vehicles of the British 1st Armoured Division, and then the 1st Division's redeployment to join 1st and 3d Armoured Divisions."<sup>55</sup> Astoundingly enough, Schwarzkopf had no better picture of Franks' situation than Pope had of Porter's.

There are naturally multitudes of other points to consider, such as how the diverging concepts of ongoing operations can cause dysfunctional misunderstandings within different levels in the chain of command. However, it is also necessary to consider how these cases display symptoms that, when implemented correctly and culturally, could be remedied by *Auftragstaktik*. These faults clearly exhibit the difficulty of changing orders on the spot and the necessity for trust between commanders along the different

levels. Even more so in a battlefield where the theater commander can quickly become unaware of changes in the battlefield of today, one becoming increasingly complex in nature with the inclusion of layers derived from grey zone.<sup>56</sup> While Franks', and Porter's, actions raise the thought-provoking question of whether all action ought to be aggressive in Auftragstaktik, his eventual reply to Schwarzkopf's frustration is perhaps far more insightful "I was thinking forty-eight hours ahead. I wanted to be in a posture that when we hit the Republican Guards, that we would hit them with a fist massed from an unexpected direction at full speed, and so what I needed to do was get the corps in a posture that would allow that to happen."<sup>57</sup> He was justifiably worried

about fratricidal fire and styled Schwarzkopf as a "chateau general" attempting to run the entire war from a bunker four hundred miles away – never even seeing Franks in person. The analysis by military journalist Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor is arguably the best way to conclude this case. As they contend that while the tension between these two certainly contributed, the fault ultimately lied with Schwarzkopf's own war plan "by having an all-out Marine attack commence against southern Iraq before the Army had the chance to move in from the west and close the Iraqis' exit door in northern Kuwait. Thus, instead of penning in Iraqi forces, Schwarzkopf's war plan pushed them out, like a cork popped from a bottle."<sup>58</sup>



## Experiences from the Home Guard

While this perspective, from an active NCO within the Swedish Home Guard with a career spanning 20 years so far, might be less in line with the focus on higher command. We believe it meaningful nonetheless in order to provide a coherent picture of the current reality. Mission type tactics, or in the language of the founders *Auftragstaktik*, is originally a German concept of leadership in battle. This is one of the popularized reasons the German Army has persisted as superior on the battlefield, and ironically also one of the reasons the IDF manage to win over numerically superior forces.<sup>60</sup> Now it is both an official doctrine in U.S. Army as well as Swedish Armed Forces as discussed above.

Central for the concept is trust in the comrades that a leader commands – the leader gives the mission, outlines the purpose of the mission and the framework with time as a limiting factor for example. After this, the subordinate receives the freedom to solve the mission with some autonomy. The strengths behind this concept are numerous, but a primary factor is that subordinates can quickly modify the plan after contact with the enemy yield constrictions to the existing plan, in contrast to overcontrol of a strict hierarchical organisation where all subordinates are just expected to do only as they are told.

For this to succeed it is necessary to create a culture within the armed forces that allow subordinates to discuss and question things (when the timing allows), as well as a culture where colleagues trust and respect one another. Otherwise *Auftragstaktik* is doomed to fail and will remain a pretty word that lacks any substance in reality. Therefore, it is imperative that:

- A) colleagues all have real competence, with no political appointment for positions or nepotism.
- B) colleagues have an open mind culture about new ideas and questioning, the opposite of blind obedience.
- C) that military exercises on all levels practice the concept *Auftragstaktik* in peacetime.

Now if we consider the Swedish Home Guard, the numerically major part of the Swedish land force, approximately 23,000 strong, this organization differs in many ways from either the professional army or the conscripted army soldiers. I will list four major points in regards to this based on my own experiences.

Firstly, the Home Guard soldier has less of a hierarchical organisational structure compared to 19-year-old conscripts new to the military or from professional soldiers with clear division between officer/NCO/soldier. In light of this, the Home Guard has a fluidity in the position one holds within the company structure (in this case 100–150 in strength). That is to say a serviceman can, at the commander's discretion, change position from soldier to NCO or officer and then back again. This happens occasionally depending on the life situation of the member in question. For example, let us say a platoon commander's life changes by becoming a parent to a newborn and feels that now is not the time for the responsibility of leading a platoon. Then that commander can easily change role to become a soldier, a deputy platoon commander, or even take the position of radio operator in the staff. This fluid hierarchy in itself gives less distance between commanders and subordinates and certainly provides an ideal starting ground where it is easier to apply *Auftragstaktik*.

A second point is doctrine in real life. Here I will provide an example from exercises I have participated in myself that can however be generalized. Beginning with the objective for the company as a whole, on all levels, to be tested and given a mission from higher command. The company command had received three days of preparation before the soldiers arrived, the platoon commanders two days and finally we as the squad leaders one day. All the participating soldiers as well as squad leaders eagerly awaited the green light to go and do our job. Yet it all turned out to be anticlimactic, as it took far into the evening, after the soldiers arrived, before we finally got the green light. That is to say, it took the company commanders four days to formulate a plan and its order to reach the level of the squad leaders and soldiers. While they have vast experiences in their roles on top of a lifetime's worth in the armed forces, could one imagine the result if it would take four days for a standard IDF company to begin moving during the six-day war?

Would the state of Israel even exist today? While the comparison might be unfair the fact remains that after that exercise, we all wondered, soldiers and NCOs alike, if we at all practised anything remotely similar to the *Auftragstaktik* we heard so much about. Some among us suggested that if this were real the commander would have been faster. While this may be a legitimate thought, then again I query; why are we practising something not functional in peacetime? Is that not just a waste of time and resources? Does the doctrine in itself allow a fast and fluid *Auftragstaktik*, which should be enabling commanders to react swiftly and respond to the constant changes in the battlefield?<sup>61</sup> In my experience, as an active member of the Home Guard, I cannot account in detail for the processes of planning at a

company command level, as I never worked there, but what I can see are the results of the work and how time consuming it often is.

Thirdly, the Home Guard is a large organization (larger than the regular army in this case) that are part-time employed will not have and cannot have the same standards for officers as their regular counterpart. Officer school for the regular force normally takes three years of studies there.<sup>62</sup> However, in large non-professional forces such as the Home Guard (or large conscript armies) one must inevitably rely on shorter training for officer level commanders on platoon and company level. Training such as two-week courses done during the course of three sessions for a platoon commander cannot be expected to hold the same level as a three-year degree's worth. That said, the Home Guard or similar forces should instead rely on a wide array of civilian qualities, such as leadership training from the private or commercial side, as all members have a civilian career outside of the military. Furthermore, many former officers that have moved on to other careers in life later return to the Home Guard for part time involvement in the armed forces. This results in a melting pot of trained former conscript commanders as well as the ones solely relying on the Home Guard provided training, three times for two weeks.

All this leads to a wide variety of leadership and tactical training that is wider in its range (from poor to excellent) compared to the more persistent character from a professional or conscript force. This is both a strength and a weakness for such a force, yet ultimately leads to a wide variety of leadership from company to company. If one were to philosophise, this can affect the trust of one's colleagues, if a commander thinks that the subordinates hold less qualified education. Then perhaps the commander is more

prone towards over control and less likely to apply *Auftragstaktik*. The opposite should be true if it is the lower-level commander with the most military schooling. However, as all members primarily come from the civilian part of society, which is characterized by its less hierarchical command structure, it should promote freethinking and render *Auftragstaktik* more likely. Further argument for this point is the higher average age of the Home Guard force, meaning that more maturity and life experience is likely in soldier and squad level alike. Even more so as that experience is imbedded from a life both in and outside the military.<sup>63</sup>

Fourthly, another point concerns the leadership within the peacetime organization outside of the company and battalion structure. To train specialists and future commanders, the Home Guard needs a comprehensive school system relying on support organizations. One would expect the same kind of leadership there as out in the companies and battalions, as it is ultimately consisting of the same individual leaders and teachers in both organizations. I have worked in this structure extensively and seen both strict command guidance (opposite of *Auftragstaktik*), excellent *Auftragstaktik* leadership, a leadership based purely on “feel good” with no focus on results and finally forms of non-leadership. This despite the fact that all military leadership schooling is towards *Auftragstaktik*, reality seems to vary vividly. Finally, with this in mind one can reasonably assume that the leadership style of an individual is retained from peacetime organization into a wartime scenario. To borrow a thought from Neretnieks, if it is not developed during peace; we cannot expect it to suddenly appear in war.<sup>64</sup> This characteristic, combined with also valuing the skills from the civilian sector, are aspects

certainly also treasured in the newly formed Space Force.

## The advent of the Space Force

We will use “mission-type orders” (MTO) to direct subordinate echelon action, and work with USSPACECOM to implement MTOs to enhance resilient and responsive command and control of operational space forces.

– Gen. Raymond<sup>65</sup>

Despite the grandiose rhetoric enveloping the establishment of the United States Space Force (USSF) by the Trump Administration in 20 December 2019. The new service is in truth the smallest, with a size of 16,000 while also responsible for the largest domain of all.<sup>66</sup> To put this into perspective, the second smallest service is the Marine Corps currently aiming for an ideal size of 190,000 servicemen.<sup>67</sup> As space has historically belonged to the United States Air Force (USAF), the motivation for separating it has been met with criticism, perhaps best summarised by Farley in his policy analysis asking whether its ahead of its time, or dreadfully premature?<sup>68</sup> Regardless of the answer, it should be clear by now that the threats and possibilities of space merit our attention.<sup>69</sup>

The head of the USSF, General John Raymond, has laid out a doctrine and digital vision for the future. In these, he justifies the establishment of a separate military service as a way to begin anew, with no previous traditions, in a creation of a military force culture. Aside from the comprehensive focus on innovation, technology and a digital service from the very foundation, he also addresses the topic of mission-type orders and tactics. The traits of small and lean size are by design, as it encourages “[...] the con-

duct of military operations through decentralized execution based on mission-type orders, which enables tactical-level initiative. Mission command assumes that the unit prosecuting an engagement maintains the greatest localized awareness and is best situated to rapidly identify and exploit opportunities.”<sup>70</sup>

This represents a crucial shift in what has been a struggle in successfully implementing *Auftragstaktik* in the U.S. Military, chiefly among these aspects is the notion of culture. As discussed previously, the German (and Prussian) successful utilization of *Auftragstaktik* was due to cultural roots, encouraging leadership with bold actions to utilize opportunities as perceived closer to the local level and further away from central command. Raymond espouses these very values, encouraging bold action and innovative thinking that stomachs deviation from the chain of command with a tolerance for changing orders and even failure as a part of learning and improving. In his own words, he calls for “a “command by negation” where subordinate echelons are expected to default to action except where a higher echelon has specifically reserved authority.”<sup>71</sup> Comparable to the effective German structure, it is similarly built on the notion of leaders at all echelons exercising a disciplined initiative in acting aggressively and independently to accomplish the common mission. Further provided with digital tools designed to facilitate this.

While the technological aspects, remaining at the bleeding edge and retaining suitable talent with relevant backgrounds beyond the military to name just two, remains the dominant factors. It is noteworthy nonetheless how coupled this is with embracing the deliberately small size of the USSF and maximizing this factor through a cultural application of *Auftragstaktik*.<sup>72</sup> The force

is by design aimed at remaining competitive in a world characterized by the Great Power Competition (GPC) that requires an acceleration of capability modernization to stay ahead of the curve. To this effect, the USSF has had two successful first years since its inception, in inventing a new purpose-built force and begun making an operational reality of an idea. Above all are the collaborations, such as partnerships with universities for personnel building and agile acquisition with America’s innovative companies, forging a digital force with new priorities in acquiring talent yet without neglecting the command structure with its emphasis on *Auftragstaktik*.<sup>73</sup>

The promise of the USSF is that, aside from its small size, it attempts in fully sizing the opportunity of starting anew as a new military service to challenge the basic assumptions and create a fresh culture, the very obstacles that have time and time again previously hindered successful implementation of *Auftragstaktik*. The USSF has the insightful perception that while the application of new technology is key to success, it needs to enhance agility, innovation and initiative of its servicemen without attempting to replace them. Only use automation if it can free up manpower to focus on these very features. Space may seem as a far-off domain, yet it is far more interconnected than most believe, sharing the same factors, with GPC, bold action and technological bleeding edge to name just the vital ones. Yet in this complex fusion of facets, it does not only elevate *Auftragstaktik* but embraces it as a core that everything else will acclimatize around.

## Conclusion

The times defined by limited communication between commanders forged *Auftragstaktik*,

with the intention of enabling one to punch above their weight by outmanoeuvring and defeating a numerical superior enemy. Prompting the question of how can it empower us to be victorious in the combat of today? The myriad of examined military services across time has yielded identifiable common faults with crucial lessons to learn in our common pursuit of successfully adopting *Auftragstaktik*. While the cultural core is key, the organizational fluidity is also necessary in order to mitigate the differing information or situational awareness, producing a dynamic of trust reciprocated with responsibility, resulting in the subordinate solving the situation by changing orders. This hones their ability to adapt to the new and changing circumstances, effectively exercising closer to the operational reality.

Despite the Space Force espousing goals as data-driven and digital fluency in a service dominated by technical weapons and satellites, it not only recognises but also actively pursues the cornerstones of *Auftragstaktik* within its very foundation. *Auftragstaktik* has been proven to be best utilized by smaller units – as it gets bigger it becomes more difficult. The small and agile nature of the Space Force is set to become one of its greatest strengths in this context, as it allows it to swiftly adapt to the fast pace of the technological development and apply it based on the battlefield conditions with an unhampered command chain. This could be placed in juxtaposition with the opposite approach, of creating a large and bulky service that attempts to monopolize all space assets and would find itself unable to adapt to the fast pace of technology and suffer from difficulty in implementing *Auftragstaktik*.

While General Raymond did not participate in Desert Storm, he served as Director of Space Forces in support of operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.<sup>74</sup> His decisions and rhetoric hints at acute

awareness of the issues discussed in this article. Now the onus is on us to continue to develop and integrate the technology necessary for decisive victory without losing sight on *Auftragstaktik*, never remising on why it needs to shape our way of thinking, not just a few handpicked conveniences but in all things we do. Ultimately, the onus now lies on the Space Force to succeed where others have failed, as the existing obstacles and excuses are invalid this time. While there is genuine hope for success, regardless the endeavour will undoubtedly provide important lessons for others on the long and winding road towards the Holy Grail of *Auftragstaktik*.

While for the rest of us, the lesson is that no matter the technology level, commanders cannot allow themselves to rely on conveniences and become detached. For initiative to develop it needs to be nourished culturally and nurtured by the entire command chain, a subordinate requires this for the confidence to boldly seize an opportunity that is in line with the greater plan and purpose. Just as we cannot be idle and opt to merely employ *Auftragstaktik* as a method, so too must we not become indolent and allow new technology to substitute the influence of a commander's presence in the crux of the battlefield as Carlson argues.<sup>75</sup> Yet this must also be approached dynamically, avoiding the pitfalls of hyper-decentralised command that Lythgoe warns against.<sup>76</sup> At best, remote control of a battlefield remains an illusion and at worst, it leads to dissonance between commanders that hurts the officer corps as a whole. To quote von Moltke, "War cannot be conducted from a green table."<sup>77</sup>

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