

MCDP 1

---

# Warfighting

---



---

U.S. Marine Corps

PCN 142 000006 00

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
Headquarters United States Marine Corps  
Washington, D.C. 20380-1775

20 June 1997

FOREWORD

Since Fleet Marine Force Manual 1, *Warfighting*, was first published in 1989, it has had a significant impact both inside and outside the Marine Corps. That manual has changed the way Marines think about warfare. It has caused energetic debate and has been translated into several foreign languages, issued by foreign militaries, and published commercially. It has strongly influenced the development of doctrine by our sister Services. Our current naval doctrine is based on the tenets of maneuver warfare as described in that publication. Current and emerging concepts such as operational maneuver from the sea derive their doctrinal foundation from the philosophy contained in *Warfighting*. Our philosophy of warfighting, as described in the manual, is in consonance with joint doctrine, contributing to our ability to operate harmoniously with the other Services.

That said, I believe *Warfighting* can and should be improved. Military doctrine cannot be allowed to stagnate, especially an adaptive doctrine like maneuver warfare. Doctrine must continue to evolve based on growing experience, advancements

in theory, and the changing face of war itself. It is in this spirit that *Warfighting* has been revised, and this publication, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, supersedes Fleet Marine Force Manual 1. I have several goals for this revision. One goal is to enhance the description of the nature of war—for example, to emphasize war’s complexity and unpredictability and to widen the definition of war to account for modern conflict’s expanding forms. Another goal is to clarify the descriptions of styles of warfare. A third goal is to clarify and refine important maneuver warfare concepts such as commander’s intent, main effort, and critical vulnerability. It is my intent to do this while retaining the spirit, style, and essential message of the original.

Very simply, this publication describes the philosophy which distinguishes the U.S. Marine Corps. The thoughts contained here are not merely guidance for action in combat but a way of thinking. This publication provides the authoritative basis for how we fight and how we prepare to fight. This book contains no specific techniques or procedures for conduct. Rather, it provides broad guidance in the form of concepts and values. It requires judgment in application.

*Warfighting* is not meant as a reference manual; it is designed to be read from cover to cover. Its four chapters have a natural progression. Chapter 1 describes our understanding of the characteristics, problems, and demands of war. Chapter 2 derives a theory about war from that understanding. This theory in turn provides the foundation for how we prepare for war and how we wage war, chapters 3 and 4, respectively.

Experience has shown that the warfighting philosophy described on these pages applies far beyond the officer corps. I expect all Marines—enlisted and commissioned—to read this book, understand it, and act upon it. As General A. M. Gray stated in his foreword to the original in 1989, this publication describes a philosophy for action that, in war, in crisis, and in peace, dictates our approach to duty.

C. C. KRULAK  
General, U.S. Marine Corps  
Commandant of the Marine Corps

DISTRIBUTION: 142 000006 00

Throughout this publication, masculine nouns and pronouns are used for the sake of simplicity. Except where otherwise noted, these nouns and pronouns apply to either gender.

## PREFACE

Eight years ago the Marine Corps published the first edition of *Warfighting*. Our intent was to describe my philosophy on warfighting, establish it as Marine Corps doctrine, and present it in an easy-to-read format. In the foreword to that manual, I charged every officer to read and reread the text, to understand it, and to take its message to heart. We have succeeded. *Warfighting* has stimulated discussion and debate from classrooms to wardrooms, training areas to combat zones. The philosophy contained in this publication has influenced our approach to every task we have undertaken.

Fleet Marine Force Manual 1 stated, “War is both timeless and ever changing. While the basic nature of war is constant, the means and methods we use evolve continuously.” Like war itself, our approach to warfighting must evolve. If we cease to refine, expand, and improve our profession, we risk becoming outdated, stagnant, and defeated. Marine Corps Doctrinal

Publication 1 refines and expands our philosophy on warfighting, taking into account new thinking about the nature of war and the understanding gained through participation in extensive operations over the past decade. Read it, study it, take it to heart.

Semper Fidelis,

A. M. GRAY  
General, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.)  
29th Commandant of the Marine Corps

# Warfighting

## **Chapter 1. The Nature of War**

War Defined—Friction—Uncertainty—Fluidity—Disorder—Complexity—The Human Dimension—Violence and Danger—Physical, Moral, and Mental Forces—The Evolution of War—The Science, Art, and Dynamic of War—Conclusion

## **Chapter 2. The Theory of War**

War As an Act of Policy—Means in War—The Spectrum of Conflict—Levels of War—Initiative and Response—Styles of Warfare—Combat Power—Speed and Focus—Surprise and Boldness—Centers of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities—Creating and Exploiting Opportunity—Conclusion

## **Chapter 3. Preparing for War**

Force Planning—Organization—Doctrine—Professionalism—Training—Professional Military Education—Personnel Management—Equipping—Conclusion

# **Warfighting MCDP 1**

## **Chapter 4. The Conduct of War**

The Challenge—Maneuver Warfare—Orienting on the  
Enemy—Philosophy of Command—Shaping the Action—  
Decisionmaking—Mission Tactics—Commander's Intent—  
Main Effort—Surfaces and Gaps—Combined Arms—  
Conclusion

---

## Chapter 1

# The Nature of War

---

*“Everything in war is simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war.”*<sup>1</sup>

—Carl von Clausewitz

*“In war the chief incalculable is the human will.”*<sup>2</sup>

—B. H. Liddell Hart

*“Positions are seldom lost because they have been destroyed, but almost invariably because the leader has decided in his own mind that the position cannot be held.”*<sup>3</sup>

—A. A. Vandegrift