Chapter 4

Being Faster

"Hit quickly, hit hard and keep right on hitting. Give the enemy no rest, no opportunity to consolidate his forces and hit back at you."[1]

—Holland M. Smith

"For the infantryman to be truly effective . . . he will have to be as light of foot as he is quick of thought. . . . Mobility is needed most of all in the clash of arms. Swift and agile movement plus rapidity and intelligent tactical flexibility are its true essentials."[2]

—John A. English

Usually, to think of weapons means to think of a personal rifle or pistol; the unit's machine guns and mortars; or the aircraft's missiles, bombs, or guns. A logistician may realize that weapons include trucks, bulldozers, and excavators. Some Marines overlook one of their most powerful weapons, one that creates advantage for infantrymen, aviators, and logisticians equally. That weapon is speed.

SPEED IN COMBAT

How is speed a weapon? Think of sports again: The breakaway in hockey uses speed as a weapon. By rapidly passing the puck down the ice, one team denies the other the chance to set up a defense. Speed circumvents their opponent's ability to respond in an organized manner. The fastbreak in basketball seeks the same result. In two or three passes, the ball is downcourt and the basket scored, all before the opposition can re- act.

The results of speed often reach beyond the immediate goal. How many times have we seen a team score on a fastbreak, steal the ball as it comes inbounds, and immediately score again, and even a third time? Unable to regain their composure, the victims of the fastbreak become the victims of a rally. The victims lose confidence. Passes go astray; signals become crossed; tempers flare; arguments ensue. The rally becomes a

rout. The beleaguered players see certain defeat. They virtually give up while still on the court.

The same thing can happen in combat. The battalion or fighter aircraft or logistics train that can consistently move and act faster than its enemy has a powerful advantage.

In June of 1943, during the battle of Saipan, the aggressive, hard-hitting tactics of General Holland Smith proved to be singularly successful in defeating the Japanese defenders. General Smith's tactical plan for Saipan called for applying "unremitting pressure on the enemy and . . . bypassing strong points of resistance for mopping up by reserve elements in order to press the attack to better ground."[3] Long indoctrinated with the value of speed in amphibious operations, General Smith's bypassing tactics placed the Japanese remaining in their fixed defenses at an extreme tactical disadvantage. These tactics proved very effective in isolating and reducing the Japanese defense. General Smith's use of speed served as a force multiplier, and it also reduced Marine casualties.

The British Royal Air Force bested the Germans during the Battle of Britain in World War II in part because they were able to speedily recover their downed pilots, return them to base, place them in new aircraft, and have them fighting again in the afternoon. Downed German pilots were less easily recovered, and the Luftwaffe had fewer of the long-range air- craft required for replacement. Eventually, pilot and aircraft losses forced the Germans to end daylight bombing and resort strictly to relatively ineffective night attacks.

Great leaders have repeatedly stated the value of speed in combat. Napoleon said, "I may lose a battle, but I shall never lose a minute."[4] Nathan Bedford Forrest told the secret of his many victories: "Get there first with the most men."[5] General Patton said in 1943, "When the great day of battle comes remember your training and remember above all else that speed and violence of attack are the sure road to success."[6] History's great commanders differed in many ways, but one thing they shared was a sense of the importance of speed.

In Operation Urgent Fury in 1983, the Marines of Battalion Landing Team 2/8, moved fast, as their commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ray Smith, had trained them to do. When they captured the operations officer of the Grenadian army, he said to them, "You appeared so swiftly in so many places where we didn't expect you that it was clear that resistance was hopeless, so I recommended to my superiors that we lay down our arms and go into hiding."[7] That is what speed used as a weapon can do for you.

WHAT IS SPEED?

"What is speed?" would seem to have a simple answer: speed is going fast. This is speed as we think of it when driving a car—more miles per hour.

That is part of the answer in tactics as well. We use speed to gain the initiative and advantage over the enemy. For example, when a tank battalion attacks, it goes over the ground as fast as it can. General Balck was asked whether the Russian tanks ever used terrain in their attacks against him in World War II. He replied that they had used terrain on occasion, but that they more often used speed. The questioner followed up: "Which was harder to defend against?" Balck answered, "Speed."[8]

Physical speed, moving more miles per hour, is a powerful weapon in itself. On our approach to the enemy, speed in movement reduces his reaction time. When we are going through him or around him, it changes the situation faster than he can react. Once we are past him, it makes his reaction irrelevant. In all three cases, speed impacts on the enemy, especially his mind, causing fear, indecision, and helplessness. Remember, attacking the enemy's mind is a central tenet of maneuver warfare.

SPEED AND TIME

In a military sense, there is more to speed than simply going fast, and there is a vital difference between acting rapidly and acting recklessly. With time we must always consider the closely related factor of timing. Speed and time are closely related. In fact, speed is defined in terms of time: miles or

kilometers per hour. In tactics, what this means is that time is always of the utmost importance. Time that cannot be spent in action must be spent thinking about how to act effectively.

Even when we are engaged with the enemy, we are not always moving fast. Some of the time we are not moving at all. Nonetheless, every moment is still of the utmost importance even when we are sitting still. A battalion staff that takes a day to plan an action is obviously slower than one that takes an hour. A tank battalion that takes 3 hours to refuel is slower than one that takes 2 hours, just as one that must refuel every hundred miles is slower than one that must refuel every two hundred. A company that sits down to eat once it has taken its objective is slower than one that immediately presses on into the enemy's depth. A fighter squadron that can fly only three sorties per aircraft per day is slower, in terms of effect on the enemy, than one that flies six. A maintenance repair team that takes 2 days to fix a damaged vehicle and get it back into action is slower, in terms of effect on the enemy, than one that can do it overnight.

Making maximum use of every hour and every minute is as important to speed in combat as simply going fast when we are moving. It is important to every member of a military force whether serving on staffs or in units—aviation, combat service support, ground combat, everyone. A good tactician has a constant sense of urgency. We feel guilty if we are idle. We never waste time, and we are never content with the pace at which events are happening. We are always saying to ourselves and

to others, "Faster! Faster!" We know that if speed is a weapon, so is time.

TIMING

We employ speed and use time to create tempo. Tempo is not merely a matter of acting fastest or at the earliest opportunity. It is also a matter of timing—acting at the right time.

Timing requires an appreciation for the rhythm of combat so we can exploit that rhythm to our advantage. It is physically impossible to operate always at peak tempo. Even though we can extend operating cycles through the economical use of resources, we cannot operate at top speed indefinitely. We must rest our people and replenish our supplies. The test of skill is to be able to generate and maintain a fast pace when the situation calls for it and to recover when it will not hurt us.

Timing means knowing when to act and, equally important, when *not* to act. Although speed is an important tactical weapon, there are situations in which it is better to bide our time. If our concept of operations involves a diversion, we need to allow time for the diversion to take effect. If we have laid an ambush for the enemy, we need to give the enemy time to fall fully into the trap. If a situation is still forming, we may want

to develop it further before we commit to a course of action. For example, an error commonly made by defenders is counter-attacking too soon so that the enemy is merely pushed back rather than cut off, encircled, and destroyed. Decisive action is our goal, and it must be timed to occur at the proper moment. There are times to act, and there are other times to set the stage and wait.

A benefit from a decision not to act is that it saves precious resources and energy for later commitment. Some leaders dissipate their units' energy on constant, unprioritized activity. Not all activities support the mission. A unit's energy is not easily replenished and should be treated as a precious resource to be expended only towards decisive goals.

RELATIVE SPEED

Going fast and making efficient use of time are both parts of the answer to the question, "What is speed?" However, something else must be considered: the enemy. As with all things in war, speed is relative. Speed is meaningful militarily only if we are acting *faster than the enemy*. We can do that either by slowing the enemy or by increasing our own speed.

In the battle for the Falkland Islands in 1982, the British Army moved slowly. The terrain was difficult, the weather was abominable, and much of the material had to be moved on men's backs, all of which slowed down the British. Nevertheless, the British still had the advantage in speed because they moved faster than the Argentines who, once they had made their initial dispositions, essentially did not move. That superiority in relative speed allowed the British to maintain the initiative throughout the campaign.

CONTINUING SPEED

To be consistent, superiority in relative speed *must continue over time*. It is not enough to move faster than the enemy only now and then because when we are not moving faster, the advantage, the initiative, passes to him. Most forces can manage an intermittent burst of speed but must then halt for a considerable period to recover between bursts. During that halt, they are likely to lose their advantage. We realize that we cannot operate at full speed indefinitely, and the challenge is to be consistently faster than the enemy.

One way to sustain speed is to use the effects of combined arms. When the infantry or mounted troops must break contact temporarily to maneuver, resupply, or recover, air or artillery can keep the pressure on. Maneuver cannot be sus- tained indefinitely, but the momentum can be maintained through skillful planning of combined arms effects, keeping the enemy always at a disadvantage.

Here the speed of logistics becomes critical. Although physical exhaustion is a factor, halts often are driven by logistics: ground or aviation units must stop for equipment repair, maintenance, and resupply. Supporting forces can minimize loss of speed if they can deliver the supplies and perform the maintenance quickly. Thus, they enable combat units to move before the enemy gains the initiative.

SPEED AND CHANGE

In order to act consistently faster than the enemy, it is necessary to do more than move quickly. It is also necessary to make *rapid transitions* from one action to another. While there are many types of transitions in combat, the important thing to remember is that transitions produce friction. Reduction of friction minimizes the loss of tempo that the friction generates at the point of transition. A unit that can make transitions faster and more smoothly than another can be said to have greater relative speed.

In the 18th century, the importance of fast transitions (sometimes called agility) was displayed when shifting from column formation into line. If an army could not rapidly de- ploy into line and consequently was engaged while still in column, it was often beaten. Much drill was devoted to practicing this difficult transition so that it could be accomplished rapidly in combat. Today we develop proficiencies in battle drills and immediate-action drills that allow units to rapidly transition from one formation to another without pausing.

It is important to be able to effect rapid changes in organization as well. Being quick to effect required changes in task organization based on a rapidly changing battle situation increases agility and decreases reaction times. Battle drills and rehearsals can be conducted to smooth out procedures for changing organization rapidly. The faster these transitions can be made, the more effective the force becomes.

The place in time and space where transitions occur can be called a *friction point*. Friction points commonly encountered in tactics include movement from an assembly area to attack; from patrol movement formation to ambush posture; from defensive posture to attack; from one maneuver to another, and so forth. The transition involves simply positional changes and drills, but also changes of attitude in the minds of Marines. We must shift our mental focus from one movement to another.

A modern example of the importance of fast transitions comes from aerial combat. In the Korean War, American

aviators achieved a high kill ratio of about 10:1 over their North Korean and Chinese opponents. At first glance, this is somewhat surprising. The main enemy fighter, the MiG-15, was superior to the American F-86 in a number of key respects. It could climb and accelerate faster, and it had a better sustained turn rate. The F-86, however, was superior to the MiG in two critical, though less obvious, respects. First, because it had high-powered hydraulic controls, the F-86 could shift from one maneuver to another faster than the MiG. Second, because of its bubble canopy, the F-86 pilot had better visibility. The F-86's better field of view provided better situational awareness and also contributed to fast transitions because it allowed its pilot to understand changing situations more quickly.

American pilots developed new tactics based on these two advantages. When they engaged the MiGs, they sought to put them through a series of maneuvers. The F-86's faster transitions between maneuvers gave it a time advantage that the pilot transformed into a position advantage. Often, when the MiG pilots realized what was happening, they panicked—and thereby made the American pilot's job all the easier.

These tactics illustrate the way fast transitions contribute to overall speed and to a time advantage. The importance of time and speed in a broader sense has been brought out in the work of John Boyd. A former colonel in the U.S. Air Force, Boyd studied a wide variety of historic battles, campaigns, and wars. He noted that where numerically inferior forces had defeated

their opponents, they often did so by presenting the other side with a sudden, unexpected change or a series of changes. The superior forces fell victim because they could not adjust to the changes in a timely manner. Generally, defeat came at relatively small cost to the victor.[9]

This research led to the Boyd theory, which states that conflict may be viewed as time-competitive cycles of observation-orientation-decision-action (OODA). First, each party to a conflict enters the fray by observing himself, his surroundings, his enemy. In tactics, this equates to adoption of a hunting instinct: searching; actively looking; hunting for the enemy; and seeing what he is doing or is about to do. It also includes anticipating the enemy's next moves—getting inside his mind.

Second, based upon those observations, the combatant orients to the situation, that is, produces a mental image of the situation and gains situational awareness. This awareness becomes the foundation on which to erect a plan. Generally, the better the orientation, the better the plan.

Next, based upon this orientation, the combatant decides upon a course of action. The decision is developed into a plan that can be disseminated among subordinates for their planning and execution.

Last, the combatant acts, or puts the decision into effect. In tactics this is the execution phase where the decision, or plan, is implemented. Since this action has changed the situation, the

combatant again observes, beginning the cycle anew. Boyd's cycle is also known as the OODA loop.

The Boyd theory helps to define the word "maneuver." It means being consistently faster than our opponent. As our enemy observes and orients on our initial action, we must be observing, orienting, deciding, and acting upon our second action. As we enact our third, fourth, and fifth move, the time gap between our actions and our enemy's reactions increasingly widens. Our enemy falls behind in a panicked game of catch up. As he tries to respond to our penetration, we attack his reserves and his command and control. As he counterattacks with his mobile reserve, we bypass with helicopterborne forces. Everything he does is too late.

Thus, the military answer to the question "What is speed?" is not simple. Nonetheless, it is central to every aspect of tactics. As General George Patton said, "In small operations, as in large, speed is the essential element of success."[10]

We should also exercise caution so as not to confuse speed with haste. General Patton made this observation:

> Haste and Speed: There is a great difference between these two words. Haste exists when troops are committed without proper reconnaissance, without the arrangement for proper supporting fire, and before every available man has been brought up. The result of such an attack will be to get the troops into action early, but to complete the action very slowly.

> Speed is acquired by making the necessary reconnaissance, providing the proper artillery [support], . . . bringing up every [available] man, and then launching the attack with a predetermined plan so that the time under fire will be reduced to the minimum.[11]

BECOMING FASTER

Now we see clearly the importance of speed. We want to be fast. How do we do it?

We start by recognizing the importance of time. As leaders of Marines, we have a responsibility to make things happen fast. Our sense of the importance of time, of urgency, must direct our actions. We must work to create and build that sense within ourselves.

Once we have it, there are a number of things we can do to increase speed. First, we can *keep everything simple*. Simplicity promotes speed; complexity slows things down. Simplicity should be central to our plans, our staffs (large staffs may be one of war's greatest consumers of time), our command and control, and our own actions.

Second, speed is increased through *decentralization*. Decentralization is an important concept in the execution of maneuver warfare. How do we achieve decentralization, while still

retaining control? We use two main tools that provide the required control of the effort and the decentralization of its execution. These tools are mission tactics and commander's intent.

Mission tactics is the assignment of a mission to a subordinate without specifying how the mission must be accomplished. It is a key tenet of maneuver warfare. In mission tactics, the higher commander describes the mission and explains its purpose. The subordinate commander determines the tactics needed to accomplish the task based on the mission and the higher commander's intent. In this way, each leader can act quickly as the situation changes without passing information up the chain of command and waiting for orders to come back down. Speed is greatly increased by this decentralization process. According to John A. English in his work *On Infantry*, decentralization has been one of the most significant features of modern war. English wrote: "In the confused and often chaotic battlefield environment of today, only the smallest groups are likely to keep together, particularly during critical moments."[12] In such circumstances, individuals rally around their leader who, armed with knowledge of the purpose or intent behind their task, can lead them toward success.

The *commander's intent* provides the overall purpose for accomplishing the task assigned through mission tactics. Although the situation may change, subordinates who clearly understand the purpose and act to accomplish that purpose can adapt to changing circumstances on their own without risking diffusion of effort or loss of tempo. Subordinate commanders

will be able to carry on this mission on their own initiative and through lateral coordination with other subunits, rather than running every decision through the higher commander for approval.

A third way to become faster is through *experience*. Experience breeds speed. Experience gives units advantages over other less experienced units. This is why veteran units are usually much faster than green, untried units. If we are familiar with a situation or at least know generally what to expect, we can think, act, and move faster. In peacetime, our Marines are not likely to be combat veterans. Still, we can give them experience through tactical decision games, sand table exercises, war games, field exercises, and rehearsals. These and other forms of training help to reduce the stress and confusion of combat.

Another way in which experience helps us become faster is through the use of *implicit communications*. Implicit communications are mutual understandings that require little or no actual talking or writing. For example, two company commanders know each other well. They think alike because their battalion commander has established standing operating procedures and has schooled subordinate commanders in an approach to war. Thus, the commander of Company B does not need to talk with the commander of Company C very often in action because each knows from common past experiences and from daily observations how the other is likely to react in many different situations. If B Company's commander creates an

opportunity, C Company's commander will take advantage of it. *That* is implicit communication. It is faster and more reliable than explicit communication (trying to pass words or messages back and forth over radios or telephones).

Of course, implicit communications must be developed over time. This requires actions that strengthen unit cohesion and mutual trust. This requires keeping people together in their units and stable in their assignments. It implies keeping good teams together. It means developing a band of brothers in our units, as Admiral Horatio Nelson did. He spent many evenings with his captains gathered in the cabin of his flagship talking over tactics, ways they might fight different engagements, how they would defeat this or that opponent. From those evenings came a shared way of thinking so strong that, at Trafalgar, Nelson needed only to signal "England expects every man will do his duty," and "Close action."[13] Sometimes words have meaning beyond the normally obvious meaning because of shared experiences and understanding.

Another way speed gains from experience is in the development of *lateral communication,* or coordination. If all communication is up and down the chain of command, action will move slowly. If commanders and leaders at every level communicate laterally—if we, as leaders, talk directly to other leaders—action moves much faster. Lateral communication is not a natural consequence of mission orders. It must be practiced in training. It results from the confidence of the higher commander who through past experiences has found that

subordinates can exercise initiative based on the assigned mission and the commander's stated intent.

A good example of lateral communication comes from aviation. In the air, the pilots of a flight of aircraft communicate laterally as a matter of course. A pilot who needs to talk to another does so. A message need not go through the mission commander and then be relayed to the other pilot. Events would quickly outpace communication if pilots tried to talk that way. The same procedures may be employed by ground combat and logistics units as well.

A fourth way to become faster is by the commander's *positioning* himself at the point of friction. This position may be with the main effort, with a supporting effort, or in the rear. A commander who is forward can instantly influence the battle as the situation develops. For the same reason, a commander may choose a position at a crucial crossroad during a night movement, or where a unit is pushing supplies forward, or where a counterattack force in the defense may be sited. The key is to be where we can best influence the actions of our units. As Marines, we believe in leading from the front since that is where most friction points occur, but they may occur elsewhere. We must choose our positions accordingly.

Throughout World War II and his entire career, Lieutenant General Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller believed that Marines had to lead from where the fighting was. "This Command Post business will ruin the American Army and Marines if it isn't watched,"[14] he said while he was the commanding officer of 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, at Guadalcanal. As a battalion commander, Puller usually positioned himself directly behind the point element of his battalion and his headquarters element directly behind the lead company so that he could best influence the actions of his unit. From this location, he was able to impose his will and personally affect the outcome of the engagement. Depending on the situation, he could also be found at other points on the march or on his perimeter. His idea was to be where he could best influence the action.

Finally, it is important not only to be faster, but to maintain that speed through time. This endurance is made possible through *physical and mental fitness*. Physical fitness develops not only the speed, energy, and agility to move faster, but it also develops the endurance to maintain that speed for longer durations. With endurance, we not only outpace the enemy but maintain a higher tempo longer than he can. Mental fitness builds the ability to concentrate for longer periods of time and to penetrate below the surface of a problem. For this reason, fitness plays an important part in the life of every Marine. Patton once said "High physical condition is vital to victory."[15]

CONCLUSION

We must be faster than our opponent. This means we must move fast, but, more importantly, we must act faster than our enemy. The aim is to tailor our tactics so that we can act faster than the enemy force can react. Our ability to plan, decide, and execute faster than our enemy creates advantage that we can exploit. We have just discussed ways to improve our speed. Readers of this publication may think of additional ways to be fast. When you find one that works, tell your fellow Marines about it so they can use it too. Anything that works to make you faster is good even if it is not yet in the books.