

Deception and the World-Class Opposing Force (WCOPFOR)

by LTC Richard T. Lambert II, Battle Command Training Program

What is the decisive principle of war that ensured strategic, operational and tactical success at Pearl Harbor (December, 1941), Voronezh (January, 1943) and Normandy (June, 1944)? The answer: **SURPRISE**. *"The experience of history shows that he who has utilized surprise in battle has always gained an advantage over the enemy."*¹ The principle of surprise in modern warfare is as viable today as in the past, and the prime method of achieving surprise is by employing deception techniques.

You may be asking yourself, "Why am I reading an article about deception written by the WCOPFOR?" The answer is two-fold. First, if a Battle Command Training Program (BCTP) Warfighter Exercise (WFX) is in your future, you need to understand how your enemy fights. Second, if you are in the U.S. Army, you typically disregard the distinct advantages deception measures provide in achieving surprise on the battlefield. This article provides commanders, and their staffs, insights into deception operations used by the WCOPFOR during BCTP WFXs. First, I will address *when* and *why* the WCOPFOR uses deception, then conclude with *how* we make deception work and achieve surprise during a WFX.

When and why the WCOPFOR employs deception operations?

Answering the first portion of this question is easy; *always*. We employ deception measures in the offense, the defense, and in meeting battles. Deception is integral to counterattacks (tactical), counterstrikes (operational), the massing of combat power, protecting reserves and preserving our center of gravity; our artillery. Deception operations are not an afterthought; we plan, coordinate, and synchronize all measures from the analysis of the situation, to formulation of the course of action, to the completion of the battle or engagement.

The reason the WCOPFOR employs deceptive measures, besides a doctrinal application of the principle, is that we believe the cornerstone to any successful operation is deceiving the enemy commander by doing the unexpected. Deception provides the means for the WCOPFOR to achieve four other principles of our operational art, each one of which is interrelated; **surprise, initiative, preservation of combat power and concentration of the main effort**.² The discussion on pages 3 and 4 presents each one of these principles and their relationship with deception operations.

Surprise. Even with the vast number of reconnaissance systems available to U.S. Commanders, the WCOPFOR believes it can achieve operational and tactical surprise. All intelligence-gathering assets, from JSTARS to Quickfix, have an inherent weakness; they are not omnipotent. These systems feed operators a vast amount of data, which is analyzed and given to the U.S. Commander (enemy). The U.S. Commander then acts upon this information. Commanders (and their staffs) are predisposed to believe certain data and disregard the rest. Our deception measures are designed to confirm the enemy commander's bias concerning our course of action and hide the true WCOPFOR dispositions. We then strike decisively and surprise the U.S. Commander and his troops.

Initiative. Retaining the initiative, even in the defense, is one of our absolute imperatives. We want to force the U.S. Commander to react to our plans, not the converse. Deception operations provide us two potential outcomes which aid our retaining the initiative. The first outcome: the enemy commander, and staff, is overwhelmed with the vast amount of information provided by his reconnaissance architecture. This creates a situation that a former WCOPFOR commander called, "paralysis by analysis;" no command decisions until better (or more perfect) intelligence is available. The second outcome: enemy deep operations destroy the decoy unit. When the targeted unit is later identified, the WCOPFOR surprises the enemy commander and takes him out of his decision cycle to re-attack the "targeted" unit, and forces him to react to the WCOPFOR initiative.

Preservation of Combat Power. For any army, success on the battlefield is maintaining sufficient forces to overwhelm your opponent during the decisive engagement. The WCOPFOR uses deception measures to protect critical assets. The second echelon, or reserves, provides depth and agility to WCOPFOR Commanders at all levels. Artillery, the WCOPFOR center of gravity, provides the lethal strike that annihilates the enemy force. Deception causes the enemy commander to commit his limited deep strike assets against the wrong targets which, in turn, preserves WCOPFOR second echelon, reserves, and artillery for the decisive battle.

Concentration of the main effort. Applying mass and overwhelming combat power at the decisive point and time on the battlefield is a critical principle to which the WCOPFOR adheres. Deception measures allow the WCOPFOR to reposition

forces and means from the supporting effort, with nominal risk, and reinforce main effort groupings. This is how the WCOPFOR achieves a favorable correlation of forces and means with the main effort command. The WCOPFOR does not piecemeal limited assets. The supporting effort commander, attacking or defending, is resourced to accomplish his mission. The next higher commander will not reinforce his subordinate's failure with additional forces from main effort groupings. This process, hidden with the application of deceptive techniques, allows WCOPFOR commanders to crush opponents at the decisive point and time on the battlefield.

In summary, the WCOPFOR always employs deception operations on the battlefield. Deception ensures that the enemy commander is surprised, which enables the WCOPFOR to maintain the initiative (even in the defense), preserves combat systems, and results in overwhelming combat power at the decisive point and time on the battlefield.

How the WCOPFOR plans and executes deception operations.

When a WCOPFOR operational or tactical commander receives his mission from higher headquarters, he analyzes the situation (using factors of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, time and troops available), then formulates his course of action and deception operations concurrently. Conceiving the deception plan is not an afterthought. As the WCOPFOR commander develops his course of action, he asks himself two questions concerning the operation:

1. What does the enemy commander see as my optimal course of action?
2. What forces do I need to resource a deception for my optimal course of action?

What does the enemy commander see as my optimal course of action?

This is the critical issue when a WCOPFOR commander is planning his deception. The WCOPFOR Commander considers the background of the enemy commander and his key subordinate commanders, or staff officers, that may influence his decisionmaking process. We evaluate his probable fighting technique (bold, audacious, cunning or conservative), identify his probable bias on how we fight, then reconsider his courses of action (COA). WCOPFOR reviews the METT-T factors from both a "red" and "blue" perspective and identifies the optimal COA. With a high degree of probability, this is the WCOPFOR COA that the enemy commander used during his wargaming process to synchronize his battle plans. **This course of action now becomes our deception.**

What forces do I need to resource a deception for my optimal course of action?

We now calculate the numbers, types and positioning of units required to confirm the enemy commander's point of view. With the myriad of reconnaissance assets available to a U.S. Commander on the battlefield, we know we cannot hide our entire main effort groupings using camouflage and concealment techniques. We also know the U.S. Commander cannot focus his intelligence apparatus over the entire battlefield. Deception operations are designed to corroborate where and when the enemy commander wants to see a specific grouping.

The enemy commander's deep attack plan may be focused to destroy our reserve tank regiment. If he expects to find the reserve 20 kilometers behind the main defensive belt, we paint that picture to his reconnaissance assets. HUMINT collectors will confirm the presence of recce, tanks and maintenance support assets; COMINT collectors will confirm the appropriate communications architecture; ELINT collectors will verify associated air defense and ground surveillance radars; moving target indicators will confirm movement of the entire regiment when the enemy commander expects a counterattack.

WCOPFOR also considers two additional aspects when resourcing the deception. First, and foremost, we identify a list of indicators which confirm, or deny, that the enemy commander believes the deception. Indicators include the positioning of reserves, field artillery, air defense, command and control nodes, engineers, and logistics facilities. Second, we consider the possibility that the deception unit may be wildly successful as a supporting effort. Since deception is very important to us, we resource it with as much as 30-40 percent of our total forces and means. Variants (branches) to the basic operation are planned to take advantage of such a situation and exploit the tactical success of deception forces.

References:

1. *"Taktika"* by V.G. Reznichenko (1987), pg 29, translated by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, JPRS-UMA-88-008-I-1, 29 June 1988.

2. Heavy Opposing Force (OPFOR) Operational Art Handbook, "TRADOC Pamphlet 350-14, 15 September 1994, pg 1-7 through 1-9.
