



Why should you read Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*?

If you picked this book because it is one of your required readings as a Private to Lance Corporal or officer candidate/midshipman, you'll also notice you are required to read MCDP 1 *Warfighting*. *Warfighting* was originally issued in 1989 – four years after *Ender's Game* – as FMFM 1. The 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General A. M. Gray wrote in his Foreword that *Warfighting* was his philosophy on fighting, thinking and approaching everything we do as Marines. While the opening statement and guiding philosophy were General Gray's, the words that came after that opening statement were written by Captain John F. Schmitt. If you are reading an edition of *Ender's Game* that includes Orson Scott Card's 1991 Introduction, you'll see Captain Schmitt mentioned towards the end. In case you have an earlier edition, what Card has to say about Captain Schmitt follows:

It [*Ender's Game*] is also a story about soldiers. Captain John F. Schmitt, the author of the Marine Corps's *Warfighting*, the most brilliant and concise book of military strategy ever written by an American, found *Ender's Game* to be a useful enough story about the nature of leadership to use it in courses he taught at the Marine University at Quantico.

The Commandant views the Professional Reading Program as part of your professional military education (PME). If you are a Marine from one of the two groups the Commandant requires to read this book, you are on your way to becoming an officer of Marines. Officers – either commissioned or non-commissioned – lead. *Warfighting* says it best: “PME is designed to develop creative, thinking leaders. From the initial stages of leadership, a leader's career should be viewed as a continuous progressive process of development. At each stage, a Marine should be preparing for the subsequent stage.” In this book, you'll read about a leader progressing from stage to stage until he takes command. This book is about preparing to lead in combat. That's what you are doing, and that's why you should read it.

1. Identify Orson Scott Card's mission (task and purpose) in writing *Ender's Game*.

Again, it is helpful if you have the edition with Card's Introduction. This explains his early interest in military history, particularly the American Civil War. His study of the Union Army of the Potomac caused him to conclude that “a great military leader imposes his will on his enemy, and makes his own army a willing extension of himself.” This exceptional leader would need to gain leadership experience. Card envisioned a Battle Room that could give that experience. The Battle Room features:

- Allows error without consequence
- Changeable environment to simulate the different conditions of warfare
- Introduce the confusion of real battle, so that the play-combat didn't evolve into something rigid and formal





Compare these features to *Warfighting* (pages 60-61):

- Exercises should approximate the conditions of war as much as possible; that is, they should introduce friction in the form of uncertainty, stress, disorder, and opposing wills. This last characteristic is most important;
- Only in opposed, free-play exercises can we practice the art of war. Dictated or “canned” scenarios eliminate the element of independent; opposing wills that is the essence of war.
- Critiques are an important part of training because critical self-analysis, even after success, is essential to improvement. Their purpose is to draw out the lessons of training. We learn as much from mistakes as from doing things well, so we must be willing to admit mistakes and discuss them. Of course, a subordinate’s willingness to admit mistakes depends upon the commander’s willingness to tolerate them. Because we recognize that no two situations in war are the same, our critiques should focus not so much on the actions we took as on why we took those actions and why they brought the results they did.

Even without the introduction, you can find Card’s purpose in Colonel Hyrum Graff’s disagreement with Major Anderson about the way to achieve effective training (pages 70-71). Anderson is overly concerned about the training process – making sure the “force on force” exercises are fair, while Graff is only concerned with product. As Graff states “Fairness is a wonderful attribute, Major Anderson. It has nothing to do with war.”

2. What part of the story really drew you in and what part was least interesting?

The most interesting part of the story is Andrew “Ender” Wiggin’s evolution as a leader, not only the lessons he learns from each commander he encounters along the way to his own command, but also the lessons he learns from the soldiers he leads. Examples:

Page 67: Lesson: Imposing your will on the enemy. Salamander Army “felt defeated. They had surrendered the initiative. Though they were still fairly evenly matched with the enemy, they huddled together like the survivors of a massacre, as if they hoped the enemy would overlook them in the carnage.”

Page 68: Lesson: Whoever has the best situational awareness needs to be allowed to make decisions. “Soldiers can sometimes make decisions that are smarter than the orders they’ve been given.”

Page 73: Lesson: Decentralization of decision making authority. “Listen Ender, commanders have just as much authority as you let them have. The more you obey them, the more power they have over you.’ . . . Ender soon learned why. Dink trained his platoon independently from the rest of Rat Army, with discipline and vigor”





Page 115: Lesson: Speed. “When you are ordered to move, move fast, so if you get iced you’ll bounce around [causing the enemy problems] instead of getting in the way of your own army’s operations.

Page 133: Give the enemy a look he hasn’t seen before and take advantage of the confusion. “None had caught on yet to Ender’s five toon organization [five maneuver elements] – it gave him the slight advantage that when they had accounted for the movements of four units, they wouldn’t be looking for a fifth.”

Page 133: Study your profession – learn from any source. “So it was from the buggers, not the humans, that Ender learned strategy. He felt ashamed and afraid of learning from them, since they were the most terrible enemy, ugly and murderous and loathsome. But they were also very good at what they did. To a point. They always seemed to follow one basic strategy only – gather the greatest number of ships at the key point of conflict. They never did anything surprising, anything that seemed to show either brilliance or stupidity in a subordinate officer.”

The least interesting part of the story was Ender’s computer games. The role playing games with the giant and playground seemed a distraction from the more interesting portions about training and preparing to lead.

3. What does Card assume to be true to accomplish his purpose? Does he validate these assumptions?

The obvious assumptions are the advanced technology – but then it is a work of science fiction so these assumptions do not require validation. Less obvious is the names adopted by Peter and Valentine for use on the web (see chapter 9). Card assumes the historical figures of John Locke and Demosthenes are known to the readers and does little to explain the significance of those names. John Locke is best known as the proponent of the Social Contract theory of government so influential with the founders of the United States – governments exist with the consent of the governed; if the government is abusive of the governed, the contract is broken. John Locke’s reasoning is very apparent in the Declaration of Independence. Demosthenes was a famous Athenian orator from the age of Alexander the Great. His resistance to Macedonian expansion at the expense of the Greek city states and the skill with which he verbally skewered opponents in debates – Demosthenes was a noted proponent of democracy – show the irony in the manipulative Peter’s choice of that pen name.

4. The part of the book that is most relevant to what we do is:

Training and Education. Good training and education do not just happen. Training needs to go beyond battle drills. Petra was the best shot in the Battle Room but ultimately had to be relived as a commander. Training needs to challenge Marines in body, mind and spirit. As General Gray stated when he published the first required reading list for Marines:





“Success in battle depends on many things. Some of which we will not fully control. However, the state of preparedness of our Marines (physical, intellectual, psychological, operational) is in our hands. The study of our profession through selected readings will assist each Marine’s efforts to achieve operational competence and to better understand the nature of our ‘calling’ as leaders of Marines.”

5. Card’s specific and implied conclusions:

Winning wars depends on the quality of the people you put into battle. Start with smart people, train them in imaginative and challenging ways, and ensure you force decision making authority down to the person with superior awareness of the tactical situation. Do not obsess over process – focus on product. Time is precious in training, so don’t waste it. Do not confuse discipline with cheerful obedience.

6. Final impressions:

Re-read the episodes of Ender Wiggin beating larger opponents in hand-to-hand fighting and then read the attached footnote. *Ender’s Game* was published at the same time Marines started reading *The Maneuver Warfare Handbook*.¹ We have since institutionalized maneuver warfare into the Marine Corps. The challenge to every generation of Marines is to continue to live up to what Maneuver Warfare philosophy demands of them. It is not easy to trust a subordinate sometimes. Don’t be a Major Anderson. Think like Colonel Graff.

¹William S. Lind, *Maneuver Warfare Handbook* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, Inc., 1985). This short book – only 133 pages – distilled the thinking and experimenting of forward thinking Marines and others associated with the military reform movement of that era. The impact of the intellectual movement that resulted in the *Maneuver Warfare Handbook* on *Warfighting* is inescapable. The *Maneuver Warfare Handbook’s* Foreword and Introduction (pages xi-xii and 1-3) are quoted below for your consideration. [*material in brackets added for clarification as necessary*]:

FOREWORD

Colonel John C. Studt, USMC (Ret)

The author of this book has never served a day of active military duty, and he has never been shot at, although there are no doubt some senior officers who would like to remedy that latter deficiency. Yet he demonstrates an amazing understanding of the art of war, as have only a small number of military thinkers I have come across in my career.

I served over 31 years active duty with the Marine Corps, saw combat in both Korea and Vietnam, and attended service schools from The Basic School to the National War College. Yet only toward the end of my military career did I realize how little I really understood the art of war. Even as a PFC in Korea, after being med-evaced along with most of my platoon after a fruitless frontal assault against superior North Korean forces, it seemed to me their had to be a better way to wage war. Seventeen years later, commanding a battalion at Khe Sanh, I was resolved that none of my Marines would die for lack of superior combat power. But we were still relying on the concentration of superior firepower to win – essentially still practicing Grant’s attrition warfare. And we were still doing frontal assaults!





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When I first heard Bill Lind speak, I must confess I resented a mere civilian expressing criticism of the way our beloved Corps did things. After all, he was not one of us, he had not shed blood with us in battle, he was not a brother.

And I had strong suspicions that he would have difficulty passing the PFT. But what he said made sense! For the first time I was personally hearing someone advocate an approach to war that was based on intellectual innovation rather than sheer material superiority: mission-type orders, surfaces and gaps, and Scwepunkt, instead of the rigid formulas and checklists that we normally associated with our training and doctrine. It was a stimulating experience. Through Lind's articulation, years of my own reading of military history began to make sense.

But why all this from a civilian instead of a professional soldier? In fact, the entire movement for military reform is driven largely by civilian intellectuals, not military officers – one notable exception being retired Air Force Colonel John Boyd. When you think about it, this is not surprising. We have never institutionalized a system that encourages innovative ideas or criticism from subordinates. Proposing significant change is frequently viewed as criticism of superiors, since they are responsible for the way things are, and borders on disloyalty if not insubordination. So it is not surprising the movement for reform comes from outside the military establishment.

And it is not surprising that the author of this book should be in the forefront of the reform movement and President of the Military Reform Institute. A magna cum laude history major from Dartmouth, Bill Lind was gifted with a brilliant mind and a rare talent for translating the lessons of history into practical application. He has studied and researched war, and has delved into the minds of the more successful practitioners, as no professional military officer I know of has done. His crusade to sell "maneuver warfare" has made him well known – if not well loved – by those who read the Marine Corps Gazette and other current military literature.

In this handbook Bill Lind lays out the concept of maneuver warfare in clear, understandable language, and he supports and illustrates his theories with excellent historical examples. What he has produced is a text book on how to conduct warfare, and it calls for a totally different approach than we teach in our schools today. Yet it is no more than a compilation of theories proven on a hundred battlefields throughout history. But it would seem that only the Germans and Israelis have institutionalized the practice of maneuver warfare in recent times.

B. H. Liddell Hart [*British soldier, military historian, author and military reformer, 1895-1970. Theories on indirect approach – exploiting gaps with small but fast forces rather than assaulting head on with overwhelming fire power – are often credited with inspiring the Germans to develop mechanized Blitzkrieg tactics prior to World War II*] once remarked that "The only thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind is to get an old one out." In 1925, when he was expounding such heretical theories as the "indirect approach," the American General Service Schools' "Review of Current Military Literature" dismissed one of Liddell Hart's major works as: "Of negative value to the instructors at these schools." I expect Marine Corps schools to receive this publication with similar enthusiasm. But I cannot believe a professional military officer would not benefit from reading it. For the first time in our history we face a potential enemy with superiority in men and material [*Colonel Studt refers to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Warsaw Pact*]. Against such an enemy we cannot win with the firepower/ attrition doctrine we embrace today. In this book Bill Lind offers an alternative.

INTRODUCTION

William S. Lind

Although this book has been written to be helpful to anyone interested in land warfare, it is addressed primarily to Marines. Most Marines have already heard or read something about maneuver warfare. It has been the subject of many articles in the Marine Corps Gazette. The 2nd Marine Division, under Major General A. M. Gray, Jr., adopted maneuver warfare as doctrine. General Gray established a Maneuver Warfare Board to help spread the concept throughout the division, and also carried out a series of maneuver warfare field exercises at Ft. Pickett, Virginia. The Junior Officer's Tactical Symposium in the 1st Marine Division has also worked to understand and





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develop maneuver warfare ideas. For a brief period, maneuver tactics were taught as doctrine at Amphibious Warfare School.

Nor is maneuver warfare just of academic interest to Marines. 2nd Battalion 8th Marines, under Lt. Col Ray Smith [*Major General Ray Smith, USMC (Ret.) received the Navy Cross for service as an advisor to Republic of Vietnam Marines during the 1972 Easter Offensive. Full biography is available at: https://slsp.manpower.usmc.mil/gosa/biographies/rptBiography.asp?PERSON_ID=319&PERSON_TYPE=General,] used it on Grenada [October 1983]. As this author wrote in a Military Reform Institute report [*“Report to the Congressional Military Reform Caucus on the Grenada Operation”, by William S. Lind, Military Reform Institute, April 5, 1984*]:*

Although the Marine units on Grenada never met much opposition, they did face a number of confusing and urgent situations, which they seemed to have handled well. Reflecting their parent 2nd Marine Division’s emphasis on maneuver warfare, they did not attempt to follow a rigid plan but rather adapted swiftly to circumstances as they changed. The speed with which the Marines acted and moved was decisive in one interesting case. The Grenadians had about one platoon of troops defending St. George’s, which ultimately did not fight. Part of the reason it did not was explained by a senior Grenadian officer after his capture. He said the Marines had appeared so swiftly where they were not expected that the Grenadian Army’s high command in the capital was convinced resistance was hopeless, the best possible outcome in maneuver warfare.

Despite all the attention, maneuver warfare remains a subject of much confusion. Some say, “It’s just a fancy new name for what we’ve always done.” Others call it “common sense tactics,” as if all it requires is a bit of common sense. Terms such as mission-type orders, reconnaissance pull, surfaces and gaps, and Schwerpunkt are thrown around with little understanding of their meaning or significance.

The purpose of this handbook is to try to clear up the confusion. It has been written as a ready reference for field Marines, not an academic monograph. It seeks to define and explain the basic concepts and terminology of maneuver warfare; to show some practical ways to apply maneuver theory, and to spur further thinking, reading, and writing on the subject by Marines.

Why should Marines care about maneuver warfare? Why should anyone bother to write a book on the subject especially for Marines? Maneuver warfare has special meaning and potential for the Marine Corps, for three reasons:

First, the Marine Corps has traditionally been an innovator. In the 1920s and 1930s, when the common wisdom said amphibious warfare was impossible under modern conditions, Marines responded with some uncommon wisdom. They studied history with great care, thought about what they had read, and gave their imaginations free rein. The developed new amphibious concepts, doctrine and techniques. With strong support from their Commandants, they took their new ideas to the field and tested them.

When war came in 1941, the new ideas were ready, and they worked. As General Alexander A. Vandegrift [*18th Commandant of the Marine Corps, commanded the 1st Marine Division in the Guadalcanal campaign and the 1st Marine Amphibious Corps in the Southwest Pacific during World War II. A full biography is available at http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/HD/Whos_Who/Vandegrift_AA.htm]* said, “Despite its outstanding record as a combat force in the past war, the Marine Corps’ far greater contribution to victory was doctrinal: that is, the fact that the basic amphibious doctrine which carried Allied troops over every beachhead of World War II had been largely shaped – often in the face of uninterested or doubting military orthodoxy – by U.S. Marines, and mainly between 1922 and 1935.” [*Quoted in The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War, Jeter A. Isley and Philip A. Crowl (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, reprinted by the Marine Corps Association, Quantico, Virginia, 1979) p.4*].

Second, Marines know they are likely to fight outnumbered. In Europe, the Warsaw Pact fields more combat units than NATO. In the Persian Gulf, nations such as Iran and Iraq have armies of 500,000 or more men.





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In other parts of the Middle East, in Asia, and even in Latin America our shortage of amphibious lift, the relatively small size of the Corps and the many commitments facing the Army mean that Marines could be sent into battle against a numerically superior enemy.

History suggests God is on the side of bigger battalions – unless the smaller battalions have a better idea. A slugging match against someone much stronger than yourself is never very promising. Even if you win, the cost is usually high. But if you can use judo against your larger opponent, if you can psych him out, throw him off balance, and use his own momentum against him, you can win, and often you can win quickly and at small cost.

Maneuver warfare can be thought of as military judo. It is a way of fighting smart, of out-thinking an opponent you may not be able to overpower with brute strength. As such, it offers Marines the best hope of winning the battles, campaigns and wars they may face in the future.

Third, to a Marine, nothing is more important than combat. In some other services, the most important things sometimes seem to be engineering or management or high technology. Marines have not fallen into these traps. They do not introduce themselves at cocktail parties as “middle managers.” They see themselves as fighters, and warriors, and they want to be the best of the breed. They are willing to work, study and, if necessary, “bet their bars” in order to be the best.

That is what this book is about – combat, and how to win in combat. That is what maneuver warfare is about. And that is why this book is written for Marines.

