

By Robert B. Adolph Jr.

Doing away with the divisions

I recently read a book, "Breaking the Phalanx," written by Army Col. Douglas A. Macgregor. (Praeger Publishers, 1997) Essentially, Macgregor takes the position that today's Army is not unlike the Macedonians prior to their defeat by the Roman legions in 200 B.C.

The Macedonian phalanx, an elongated rectangle of heavily armed soldiers which stood 16 deep, and was composed of up to 10,000 men, would run directly at an enemy weak point breaking their formations and ultimately defeating them. Enemies were overwhelmed by the brute power of the phalanx. But the phalanx was eventually defeated because a cagey enemy made some radical organizational changes.

The smaller, faster and more agile Roman legions, consisting of 5,000 soldiers on average, simply outmaneuvered the Macedonians at Thessaly and compelled the Macedonians to surrender their control of Greece and the Aegean Sea.

Americans, Macgregor points out, should become more like the Romans — not the Macedonians. The Romans precipitated a revolution in military affairs. They broke the phalanx, which was considered unbreakable.

Macgregor's observations are trenchant. Today's Army is much like that of Macedonia. Our current primary warfighting formation is a dinosaur of sorts — the division. It is too large, requires too much logistical support, and is too slow making decisions in the "Information Age."

Moreover, only the 82d Airborne Division and Special Operations Forces are capable of

getting to hot spots around the globe in a timely fashion.

Dispensing with the division structure will be difficult for our Army. The Army has used it in various forms since the Civil War. Its history is long and glorious. Yet, in order to face the most likely threats of the 21st century, Macgregor says the division must go. I agree wholeheartedly.

The Army, through its division structure, is largely a brute-force organization. But massed firepower today has distinctly less utility than in years gone by. Operation Desert Storm cannot become the model for how future U.S. battles will be fought.

The Gulf War should be considered a historical anachronism. Most military analysts agree that future battles will be won by those forces that can capitalize on new technologies, weapons, organizations and tactics in the new warfighting environment created by near real-time intelligence and subsequent rapidity in the decision-making cycle.

Current trends suggest that combat in cities may be the most likely wave of the future. The division structure is too cumbersome to be effective in the environment characterized by urban sprawl.

Macgregor proposes lighter, faster, independent self-supporting regimental combat teams, or combat groups, based on the brigade task force model. He states that, "converting 10 divisions to 30 standing brigade task forces would add cohesion and continuity to the Army at a level where it is most critical to success in combat."

Brigadier generals would command these

"task forces." Colonels would serve as their chiefs of staff and deputy commanders. Lieutenant colonels would serve as staff heads in Personnel, Intelligence, Operations, Logistics and Civil Affairs/Psychological Operations.

Such organizations are designed for fighting. Their tooth-to-tail ratio is excellent. And, because of the flattened command structure, decisions can be made rapidly at the lowest level in order to gain and maintain the initiative in a battle.

Divisional staffs could be maintained in the unlikely event of war on the scale of World War II. Army Corps would be formed as joint task forces, and manned jointly by all the services, further enhancing interoperability and interservice cooperation.

Macgregor gets it right when he states that, "In practice, the contemporary Army still treats warfare as an activity that can be carefully orchestrated." The service schools and staff colleges still reflect this kind of archaic thinking, and this could sound the death knell of American pre-eminence around the globe.

The division structure lacks the flexibility, transportability and speed necessary to compete successfully on future battlefields. Radical changes are needed in our future warfighting organizations.

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