



FEDERATION COMMANDER TACTICS MANUAL



ADAM TURNER
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FEDERATION COMMANDER

TACTICS MANUAL

*by Fleet Captain Patrick Doyle
Four-Time FC National Champion*

"Mission First; Crew Always"



DEDICATION

This manual is dedicated to the memory of my good and dear friend Mr. John Kohn. He was a husband, sailor, soldier, musician, and a soon-to-be father. He was lost in a tragic police academy training accident as he continued on his path of service to community and country.

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1 BASIC TACTICS

"Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."
— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

INTRODUCTION

The goal of the *Federation Commander Tactics Manual* is to provide you the information necessary to help make you a better player. There are three basic steps in your journey to improve your abilities as a starship captain. First, you must clearly understand the rules and how the rules interact. Your foundation should be built upon a solid knowledge of the rules.

If you are reading this, you are on the second step. Keep reading and you will find that all of *Federation Commander's* key topics are discussed in detail. We will illuminate the various rule interactions and how you can take advantage of them.

Finally, having read the manual, you must strive to implement what you have learned. You must try to glean lessons from your experiences so that you can improve for the future. This third point requires a little work and introspection on your part. This may be more effort than some are willing to apply to a game, and that is fine. Choose the level of play that is fun for you. But even the casual player should learn something from this book.

This is the first tactics manual for *Federation Commander*. At the time of writing, *Federation Commander* has been around about eight years, enough time for the core ideas to be developed and tested. While there is plenty of time for new ideas to replace the information in this book, the tactics here represent some of the best, and most current, tactical thinking in *Federation Commander*.

We have tried to provide articles with broad tactical principles as well as very specific step-by-step techniques and procedures when applicable. Some articles will make generalized tactical recommendations on a particular topic, giving you the "best practices" while others simply provide insight into how the rules might work in your favor in a given situation.

TACTICS vs. STRATEGY

The concepts of tactics and strategy are often used interchangeably and incorrectly. The difference between the two ideas is usually one of scale. Tactics involve the employment of forces in battle and that is what this book is about.

The definitions below emphasize the differences between the two concepts.

"Tactics: The science and art of disposing and maneuvering forces in combat."

"Strategy: The science and art of employing the political, economic, psychological, and military forces of a nation or group of nations to afford the maximum support to adopted policies in peace or war."

— Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Perhaps a simpler definition is that strategy is how you get to the battlefield while tactics are what you do *on* the battlefield, i.e., in the presence of the enemy.

Strategy is beyond the scope of *Federation Commander*, as it deals with employing force on a national (or imperial) scale. However, a few articles will discuss strategic issues to put battles into proper context. If playing *Federation Commander* in a historical or campaign context, then

your tactical engagements should further larger strategic or operational level goals.

Tactics are almost always open to some level of debate. When you ask the question: "What is the best way to do X?" you will usually get a variety of answers. Not everyone will agree on the best tactics for a given situation. If after reading an article in this manual, you feel that you have a better idea, try it out next time you play. If it works consistently, you have a new tactic. If it works once in 10 attempts, you have a new form of gambling.

Tactics do not stand still; they evolve over time. When you pull a new trick on your opponent, the smart opponent will adjust his tactics to counter your actions and try to defeat you with new tricks of his own. This will then force you to come up with new tactics. This cycle will repeat itself for as long as you play. Therefore, it is entirely possible that with time, some of the tactics herein will become outdated, and new tactics will emerge, potentially opening the door for an *Advanced Tactics Manual*.

ORGANIZATION OF THE TACTICS MANUAL

For simplicity, the *Federation Commander Tactics Manual* is organized in the same basic way as the *Federation Commander Rulebook*. Thus, as much as possible, the location of subjects in the first six chapters parallels the *Federation Commander Rulebook*.

The subject matter within the chapters diverges at Chapter 7: Empires. This is where we will discuss the specific tactics of each empire currently in *Federation Commander*. Empire-specific technology and weaponry (i.e., weapons used only by one empire) will be discussed there rather than discussing those systems separately within Chapters 4 or 5. The thought behind this is to put as much data as possible about a specific empire in a single place. For example, the Seltorian web breaker is used only by that empire and is mentioned only in this chapter. The result is that Chapter 7 is the largest part of the *Federation Commander Tactics Manual*.

Chapter 8: Special Tactics includes articles about the operations of certain types of vessels such as battleships, frigates, freighters, and bases.

Chapter 9: This is the capstone of the *Federation Commander Tactics Manual*. The Fleet Captains section includes articles designed to take your gameplay to the next level and to broaden your perspective beyond the tactical.

Chapter 10: For ease of reference, this includes the weapons and other charts and tables from all current *Federation Commander* modules.

Chapter 11: This compiles all of the Command Notes published to date in *Captain's Log*.

UNDERSTAND THE RULES

The rulebook is a great source of tactical ideas and tells you all the actions that you can perform. The better you understand the rules, the better you can anticipate your enemy's actions and understand your own options during critical situations.

The articles in this manual assume that the reader understands the rules. Hopefully, the *Federation Commander Tactics Manual* will provide insights into what the rules allow you to do. If an article doesn't make sense, go back and re-read the applicable rules.

This book also assumes that you play *Federation Commander* as it is written and without any house rules. Any house rule could alter the effectiveness of tactics discussed in this book. We also assume that all of the rules that are in *Federation Commander* are used.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

To quote one of my former Navy ROTC instructors: "Everything is a tactical tradeoff." It was the only intelligent thing this particular instructor ever said but noteworthy nonetheless. What he was saying is that every decision you make will have a cost and, hopefully, a benefit. The key is to gain the most benefit while making the cost as inconsequential as possible. Below is a list of just some of the decisions that you will have to make over the course of a single game of *Federation Commander*.

- What baseline speed will you set?
- How will your opponent react to any action you take?
- How should you then react to your opponent?
- How will you approach your enemy? Will you make a head-on attack, or approach obliquely (and what does obliquely mean anyway?)
- Will you use evasive maneuvers or a cloaking device?
- At what range will you engage your enemy? What range favors your ships and weapons while putting your enemy at a disadvantage? Will you need to accelerate or decelerate to get to that range?
- How much power will you use in your attack? Will you save any power for the unexpected?
- Which weapons will you fire and which will remain unfired?
- How will you deal with enemy seeking weapons?
- Should you reinforce your shields? If so, how much power should you use?
- When you take damage, how should you use your frame boxes? Should you use them up at the first opportunity or save them to protect a vital system?
- Is it safe to drop a shield for a Marine raid? If so, what systems will you attack and can your enemy reciprocate?
- Is the enemy likely to tractor beam your ship?
- Should you launch seeking weapons now or wait until next impulse?
- Should you launch the plasma torpedo as a seeking weapon or fire it as a bolt/carronade?
- Should you launch all your drones at a single target or should you divide them among a couple of enemy ships? Should they be in the same hex or spread out?
- What systems should you repair: weapons, engines, or something else?
- How should you manage your shields? Should you try to restore some shields during the Energy Allocation Phase or just depend on transferring shields?
- The answer to all of these questions is... it depends. These are just some of the more obvious questions. That is where good judgment comes into play. The answer to each of these questions is different in different situations.
- After reading this book, you should be able to answer these questions under many different circumstances.

COMPARISON TO SFB

It is interesting to note that the *Star Fleet Battles Tactics Manual* begins with these very similar lines:

"All tactics are based on choices, options, and compromises. Some tactics produce advantages and opportunities at the cost of giving up other opportunities or accepting other risks. Successful tacticians are those who can recognize the best tactics to employ in a given situation and who can create situations where their tactics will be successful."

From this we may learn two things:

First, that the Army ROTC instructors who taught Stephen V. Cole (who designed both *SFB* and *FC*) had some training in common with my Navy ROTC instructors.

Second, that all conflict uses the same tactics, except where the situation, terrain, and technology require those tactics to be changed or adapted to each different venue.

This is why *FC* needs its own *Tactics Manual*.

FOR WHOM WAS THIS MANUAL WRITTEN?

This book is written for anyone who plays *Federation Commander* or who wants to play *Federation Commander*. This manual is written (hopefully) so that the new player will learn from experienced players. Reading this manual should speed the development of novice players into competent players. It will reduce the amount of trial and error that would otherwise be required to gain the necessary insights to be competitive. The *Federation Commander Rulebook* teaches you how to play; the *Tactics Manual* should teach you how to play well.

Experienced *Federation Commander* players will be familiar with many of the concepts in this manual, but there will also be enough new information for experienced players to fine-tune their skills as a starship captain.

Finally, there is the *Star Fleet Battles* player that is trying *Federation Commander* for the first time. *Star Fleet Battles* has many rules and options that provide very rich tactical complexity. The price for this complexity is often a large time commitment, especially when playing large battles.

In contrast, *Federation Commander* has streamlined rules that allow more ships to be engaged in a single battle while retaining the essence of *Star Fleet Battles*. The tactical complexity in *Federation Commander* comes from having more ships engaged in a battle, and those battles can usually be completed in much less time than an equivalent engagement in *Star Fleet Battles*.

The following article by Steven P. Petrick will introduce you to many of the differences between the two games. Things in *Federation Commander* may work differently than in *Star Fleet Battles (SFB)*, but have faith, because *Federation Commander* plays very well despite, or perhaps because of, those differences.

WHERE DID ALL THE CAPITAL LETTERS GO?

Since she first appeared on ADB's scanners, Jean Sexton has waged a one-woman war against Creeping Capitalization. The game designer, however, tends to use the German-Military rule and will capitalize anything and everything that "looks like it deserves it." This war has gone on for years and Jean seems to be winning. In one of her first victories, she convinced ADB, Inc., that "things" don't need capital letters, so Drone, Phaser, Heavy Cruiser, and Shuttle disappeared a few years ago. Jean, however, has not given up. Military ranks such as lieutenant, once capped routinely, are now capped only when part of the title of a specific individual, e.g., Lieutenant Smith.

In a later victory, military job descriptions such as Senior Watch Officer and Navigator were stripped of their prized capitals, but that was only an interim step.

In her most recent victory, she convinced ADB, Inc., that "titles" should be capitalized but "terms" should not be. Thus, rule (2D2) High Energy Turns deserves to be capitalized (it's a title) but saying "at this point you make a high energy turn and deliver an alpha strike" does not need a single capital letter. Some examples of her triumph include damage points, fleet scale, overload, evasive maneuvering, emergency deceleration, directed targeting, tactical maneuvers, and (gasp!) oblique attack.

Jean also applied "the numeric rule" under which Baseline Speed 24 is capped but "pick a baseline speed" is devoid of its honorary capitals. Similarly, Turn Mode B is capped but a ship that has "a good turn mode at all speeds" does not need such frippery.

Things like the Defensive Fire Phase have kept their capitals (since they are "titles" from the Sequence of Play).

The result is that the *Federation Commander Rulebook* has a High Energy Turn and a Baseline Speed but the *Federation Commander Tactics Manual* does not.

We hope you adjust. (Steve Cole had a Breakdown.)

FROM *SFB* TO *FED COMMANDER*

by Steven P. Petrick

Federation Commander is a new game, not just *Star Fleet Battles* with 97% of the rules missing. Things simply do not work the same, and the many differences large and small add up to a very different tactical environment. For *SFB* players coming over to play *Federation Commander*, here is a brief introduction.

The biggest change is in power. First, even in squadron scale ships (mostly identical to *SFB* ships), you have more power than you did in *SFB* because there is no “house-keeping” cost. (To simplify the rules, the designer made fire control, life support, and shields free.) There is also no electronic warfare, which consumes up to six points on an *SFB* ship. All of this allows more power to hack and slash your opponent’s ship.

There is no “quarter turn delay” over the turn breaks, but there is a sort of delay built into the system, since there is an action impulse every fourth movement sub-pulse. After firing at the end of Turn #1, the target has up to four sub-pulses in which it can try something to get out of your gun sights before you can fire again. *SFB* players might grasp the concept more clearly if it is explained as follows: the 32 *SFB* impulses are grouped into eight *FC* impulses. During each of those impulses you can fire (tractor, lab, transport, whatever) once, but you might move up to four times. There are only four “baseline speeds” (Zero, 8, 16, 24) but during every one of those eight impulses, you could pay one point of power (well, technically, power equal to one hex of movement) to move an extra hex, or you could pay points of power to cancel any or all of the individual points of movement provided by your baseline speed (even movement points you just bought).

You spend all of your power (other than baseline speed and arming photons) on an “as needed” basis, so everything is (effectively) reserve power, with a couple of caveats. The biggest of those is that you can use as much power to reinforce a shield as you have batteries (but you can do that for every volley). With the inability to massively reinforce a shield (and the “leak” that happens when a volley of 10 or more points does not penetrate), relatively smaller volleys are going to score internal damage. Due to the way the DAC works, single internal leak points will probably not take out a truly critical weapon, but could affect a warp engine or a phaser (or two) early in the battle.

Leak damage is countered by the repair systems. In *SFB* your repairs are limited, while in *FC* they are unlimited and cost no energy. If you have just lost four hull boxes, and nothing else, there is simply no reason not to repair them at the end of the turn (assuming a damage control rating of four, typical of a cruiser in squadron scale). In *SFB*, you would not want to waste your repairs (a cruiser has four, total, for the whole scenario) on mere hull boxes. That brings up another point: damage control does not have to be planned at the start of the turn. Since you will have damage control points again at the end of next turn, there is no reason not to fix those hull boxes and have them available for “padding.” Repair costs are lower in *FC*. It costs 10 repair points to fix one box of a warp engine in *SFB*, but only three in *FC*. A typical (squadron scale) cruiser could repair one power system (battery, warp box, impulse box) or weapon (phaser, photon, drone rack) every turn.

While drones are much more limited, the repair system is now used to reload drone racks by “repairing” them. (If a rack is destroyed, you have to “repair” it first, and then “reload” it later, but each costs one turn of a squadron scale

cruiser’s repair points.) This means that your supply of drones is virtually unlimited (those crazy engineers are running the replicator overtime), although there are a lot of other limitations on drones. Drones are all Speed 24 (except in some optional rules) and there are no special warheads. There are no “heavy” drones or “dogfight” drones, and, of course, there are no ECM drones. There are other limits. Only the ship that launches a drone can control it, as there are no transfers of control (not even for the Kzintis) and no drones are self-guiding. But that’s not the big thing. The big thing is that while drones can still do a high energy turn (*FC* does not use as many acronyms including HET), there are three differences: they can only make such a turn if doing so will make them hit their target, they *must* do so if doing so *will* make them hit their target, and worst of all, they move on the same impulse that they make the high energy turn. All of this brings the famous “Zimdars Dipsy Doodle” tactic (where six drones can each be maneuvered to hit a different shield simultaneously) to a crashing stop.

The strange thing about drones is that they “impact” during movement but do not “hit” until after the target gets a chance to stop them during the Defensive Fire Phase. During that phase, almost every ship has a multi-layered defense. First, if it has an anti-drone, it can fire one shot at one drone. After knowing the result, the ship can allocate some or all of its phasers to fire at drones that have “impacted” during the previous movement’s sub-pulses. If all of the phasers miss (or you didn’t fire any, or you didn’t have the power to fire them), you still have one last chance to stop the drone by using a tractor beam (which costs a point of power). Doing this is dangerous, although it would allow you to target the drone with a phaser during a later Defensive Fire Phase. If the tractor beam is destroyed during a later Offensive Fire Phase (or Defensive Fire Phase for that matter), the drone it was holding hits immediately with no further counter measures. Other ships cannot target a drone that has “impacted” (even if held in a tractor) since it is too close to the ship. You can still be overwhelmed by a drone wave using standard *SFB* tactics. Launch drones late on one turn and follow them, adding more drones early on the next turn; this is easy in *Federation Commander* as there is no quarter turn delay in using the same drone rack. Defense tactics are easier in *FC* since you can count the drones and don’t have to worry that one of them may be armored or double-size and you know exactly how many points it takes to kill each one of them.

The Klingons are subtly different in *Federation Commander*. There is no mutiny (a plus) but the security stations are no longer there to absorb damage. The various disruptor charges are all merged into one chart that even the Tholians and Kzintis use, so there is no UIM.

One difference between *FC* and *SFB* is the maximum range (25 hexes) for all weapons. While nobody accomplished much firing at 30 hexes in *SFB*, it was always an option. Smaller disruptor-armed ships still have the original limits, but the D6 technically gained a couple of hexes.

On the plus side, all ships include (most of) the various refits that were added to them over the years. *SFB* has been in play, so the D7 has three phaser-1s in its nose, the Federation heavy cruiser has those two RH phaser-1s and the type-G drone rack, etc. The big difference is that the Y175 refit does not exist, and all drone racks (except the Federation type-Gs) hold only four drones and can launch one drone a turn (no type-C drone racks). The type-G in *FC* has two drones and four anti-drones, and can operate in only one of those modes during any given turn.

Tractor beams are very, very different. While tractor, negative tractor, and auctions still work the same, tractor beams are limited to a range of one. If two ships are tractor linked, the one applying more power moves both of them and the other ship’s engines are ignored. Only two ships



can be in a tractor link; a third ship trying to “cut in” will break the previous link (or fail to get its own). Of course, you can still tractor as many non-ship units as you have unused tractor beams.

SFB players will need a few games (and a few embarrassing defeats) to realize all of the differences between the two game systems. Until then, watch your back and don't run out of power.

SFB NOTE: Occasionally, when appropriate, these sections highlighted in grey will either provide some background for players or highlight differences for *Star Fleet Battles* players learning to play *Federation Commander*.

GLOSSARY

Before we go any further, we must make sure we are speaking the same language. The following terms are used throughout the *Federation Commander Tactics Manual* and within the *Star Fleet Universe* in general. You should familiarize yourself with these terms and refer back to the glossary as necessary.

Alpha Strike: A ship's maximum single-impulse firepower, involving all available weapons, overloads, etc.

Battle Pass: Moving past the target and allowing side/rear weapons to fire thus allowing the moving ship to reach rear areas.

Battle Run: Moving toward the target then turning away at short range, bringing rear-firing weapons to bear.

Centerline: The row of hexes extending directly forward of the #1 shield. Being “centerlined” is when a target ship is positioned directly on the hexrow in front of the firing ship. This is often a bad position to be in because some ships get their maximum fire power only in that hexrow.

Death Dragging: Holding a shuttle (or fighter) in a tractor beam and moving at a speed of 16+1 or faster. This will destroy the shuttle/fighter when it moves on Sub-Pulse #2.

Drone Swarm: A group of drones moving together in one hex, often toward the same target.

Fleet Scale: Not to be confused with a fleet battle. If we are referring to fleet scale ships, the term fleet scale will be written out. Fleet battle or fleet of ships simply refers to a large number of ships regardless of whether they are fleet scale or squadron scale.

Gorn Anchor: Holding the enemy in a tractor beam to prevent it from running away from any seeking weapons.

Klingon Saber Dance: Maneuvers producing a series of attacks from beyond overload range as an attrition tactic while avoiding serious damage.

Lag Pursuit: The pursuer points the nose of his ship behind the target. It minimizes the closure rate while keeping the pursuing ship behind its target.

Lead Pursuit: The pursuer points the nose of his ship ahead of the enemy, allowing the pursuer to maximize closure, i.e., to get closer more quickly.

Mission Kill: Though not destroyed, a ship that is said to be a “mission kill” is one that will no longer be able to accomplish its mission. This is usually due to an attack or enemy action.

Mizia Concept: A theory under which the most effective attack is a series of small volleys (ideally three damage points) against the same down shield from multiple ships during a single impulse. If it can be repeated over multiple impulses then that is even better. Due to the DAC, this works better in *SFB* than in *FC*, but it still works.

Oblique Attack: An attack that moves to one side of the enemy while attacking with flank weapons. It is used to avoid decisive close-in battle.

Overrun: Movement through the hex occupied by the target, creating opportunities for point-blank fire.

Plasma Ballet: The art of using plasma torpedoes to keep the enemy at a safe distance while inflicting damage on them. It is the plasma equivalent to the Klingon Saber Dance, though more difficult to perform.

Power Curve: An indefinite expression indicating the relative amount of power a given ship has as measured against what it needs to arm its weapons. In effect, a ship with a “good power curve” has surplus power making it more effective in combat.

Pure Pursuit: This is when the pursuing ship points its nose directly at the target. You don't get to short range as fast as you would in a lead pursuit, and you don't necessarily stay behind the enemy like you do in a lag pursuit.

Pursuit Curve: A pursuing ship can choose lead, lag, or pure pursuit depending on the tactical requirements of the battle.

Range: Throughout this book, various terms are used to describe the range to the target. These terms are based on the situation and weapons and cannot always be expressed in a specific number of hexes. This brief list defines the most common terms that refer to range. All reference to ranges are located below in parenthesis.

Close Range: This can vary based on the weapon but it is generally 3-5 hexes. It is the point at which a range bracket changes on the weapon table and makes a significant increase in effectiveness (such as Range 3 for a phaser-2 or Range 5 for a phaser-1).

Glory Zone: This is any range bracket in which one ship is markedly more effective than its opponent. Most often applied to plasma ships, which can bolt their torpedoes from Range 9-10, outside of the overload range of other direct-fire weapons while still being able use directed targeting. Ships with plasma torpedoes can attempt a long-term attrition battle from this zone.

Knife-Fighting Range: This is generally two hexes or less, and refers to the slow-speed, tightly maneuvering dogfight. Overloaded weapons, tractor auctions, reinforced shields, and suicide shuttles characterize these fights.

Long Range: Anything beyond medium range out to 25 hexes. Weapons are ineffective except on a defenseless and badly damaged target.

Medium Range: Generally refers to ranges from 9-15, beyond overload range. In this zone, weapons maintain some effectiveness.

Myopic Zone: A close-range zone (0-3 hexes) into which the PPD cannot fire.

Overload Range: This is eight hexes or less. Most maneuver tactics are based on getting into or avoiding overload range.

Point Blank: Generally refers to Range Zero, Range 1, or the lowest range bracket for a given weapon. For some heavy weapons, it is the range at which the weapon hits automatically.

Short Range: See Close Range. These terms are interchangeable.

Tractor Range: A maximum of one hex in *FC*.

Transporter Range: A maximum of five hexes.

Space Superiority: A type of mission in which a commander tries to control an area of space while engaging any enemy ships that enter that space.

Sub Hunt: The basic tactic against cloaked ships. Rather than waiting for the cloaked ship to uncloak, the hunting ship fires a series of small attacks to score enough damage that the cloaked ship realizes he cannot remain cloaked forever. Meanwhile, the hunting ship retains enough firepower to make uncloaking suicide.

Turn: This can have multiple meanings in *FC* as in *SFB*, depending on the context: a 60° heading change by a ship, a game turn, i.e., the eight-impulse Sequence of Play, or a “turn for the worse” being a literary term for “oops.”

Under-Run: An overrun performed by a cloaked unit.



FEDERATION COMMANDER TACTICS MANUAL



TACTICS

The art and science of maneuvering forces within the presence of the enemy.



MANEUVER

Selecting the right baseline speed, battle passes and battle runs, turning, oblique attacks.

COMBAT

Firing arcs, reinforcing vs. dropping shields, directed targeting vs. general targeting.

WEAPONS

Phasers, plasma torpedoes vs. plasma bolts, disruptors and knife-fighting, drones.

SYSTEMS

Tractor beams, transporters and Marine raids, damage control, suicide shuttles, special sensors.

TERRAIN

Arena vs. open space, planets and asteroids, variable pulsars, nebulae, and black holes.

EMPIRES

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