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DISCUSSIONS ON THE CONDUCT OF WAR

FEATURING

AN AUSTRALIAN
OFFICER

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the sixth edition of Military Operations.

My attention was recently drawn to a new book on COIN. The book is fairly critical of US and British experience of COIN. It seeks to explode myths about (for example) British expertise in post-colonial campaigns and 'hearts and minds' operations. The author stresses that in Northern Ireland, British strategy and tactics only began to evolve fifteen years into the conflict.

Criticism is good. Busting myths is good. But it needs to be done on the basis of facts.

Fifteen years after 1969 is 1984.

The Troubles in Northern Ireland broke out on 14 August 1969. By sometime in 1970 there was a full-blown insurgency. A troop surge in 1972 (Operation Motorman) broke the back of the insurgency. Republican insurgents evolved into terrorists. Military operations were scaled down. In 1976 the British Army handed over primary responsibility for operations to the police. In 1979 the IRA killed 18 soldiers with two IEDs in a single operation. Thereafter they rarely killed as many as ten soldiers in any one year. When they did, it was always the consequence of a single IED.

After 1976, and certainly after 1979, the British Army were supporting the police in a counter-terrorist campaign. The relevant British term is 'Military Aid to the Civil Powers' and that is exactly how the Government described its operations.

This is not a discussion of terminology. It gets to the heart of the discussion in that book. The British Army weren't 'doing' COIN in any identifiable way in the 1980s. The relevant material, which lays down the facts described above, was released into the public domain in 2006. The trouble with books like that is that once they are published they are 'out there'. They affect opinion. They are an ambush for the unwary. We can only hope that they don't sell well. To repeat: criticism is good. Busting myths is good. But it needs to be done on the basis of facts.

In this edition, the commander of an Australian battle group describes his observations from operations in Afghanistan in 2011 (see 'Commanding Officer's Observations: Mentoring Task Force Three'). The article is a verbatim extract of the CO's report, which he passed up the chain of command. It is critical, it is honest, and in a sense it is worrying. One thing which it suggests is that, despite their deep operational experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, modern armies have forgotten some of the essentials of how to fight.

As one highly-experienced British general put it in the 1950s (he had fought in both World Wars), 'if you get slack, you die'. He was talking about the relaxation of hard-learned individual and low-level lessons that Commonwealth armies call 'battle discipline'. In several instances the present article talks about the same lessons. Film footage from Iraq and Afghanistan frequently shows the same errors. The soldiers should know better. The people who instructed them should have known better. The people who instructed *them* **did** know better.

This is not a grumble by a greybeard. It is not a rant by an armchair general. It is a fundamental question about how armies learn *and remember* those (literally) vital lessons which are so hard-gotten in war. Unfortunately it also gets to issues of self-image, corporate pride and professionalism. Few of the soldiers involved would think they were not professional. But in a great many cases we could point out basic, amateur mistakes which end up with soldiers getting killed.

You may have a view on this. Good. Please write and tell us.

Since its first edition, Military Operations has considered the questions of the operational level of war and operational art. In this edition, Aaron Jackson's article 'Surrogate: Why Operational Art Adopted Strategy' looks at some of the background and the mechanics behind the invention, discovery or creation of the operational level in Western practice. It gives a deep insight into the real dynamics by which concepts actually enter practice, involving institutions (hence aspects of sociology) and myths and beliefs (hence aspects of anthropology). 'The Operational' in the Information Age' by Phillip Jones provides a different perspective on both issues; it considers the creation and dissemination of campaign narratives.

A couple of years ago I was invited to join some senior officers who were thinking great thoughts about future concepts for British armoured reconnaissance. If I was being cynical, I would translate that as 'We are about to get the FRES Scout (an armoured reconnaissance vehicle). What will we do with it?' (Something similar happened in the mid-1980s with the Warrior IFV). My article 'Manned, Armoured, Reconnaissance: Why and How?' in this edition reflects some of my thoughts. (It should not take a retired infantry officer to remind the British Army of the need to counter enemy reconnaissance. But it did.)

Land warfare is an intensely physical and practical discipline. However, brute force alone just gets people killed. The key issues in land warfare are mental, and none of them is more important than military decision-making. This edition contains two quite different articles related to that subject. They are:

'The Enemy Has a Vote' and Other Dangers in Military Sense-Making' by Ben Zweibelson;

and

'Thinking Fast and Slow for Soldiers' by John Wilson.

Once you have read them, please stop and question whether your formal training in the combat estimate, or the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP), or similar, has really equipped you for how to think in complex, dynamic and high-consequence situations.

This edition also includes a short piece describing Military Operations' and Infinity Journal's Masterclass programme. It looks at the rationale for, the content of, experiences of, and plans for the programme: last year, this year, and in future. If you aren't aware of this year's Masterclass events, see <https://www.tjomo.com/masterclass>.

Plans for the seventh edition of Military Operations are well in hand, but we're always keen to consider further material. If you have something to contribute, or an idea, then contact me at editor@tjomo.com. We are always particularly keen to publish articles from junior officers, warrant officers and non-commissioned officers.

Jim Storr

Editor, Military Operations

April 2014

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COMMANDING OFFICER'S OBSERVATIONS: MENTORING TASK FORCE THREE



The Commanding Officer of an Australian battle group in Afghanistan in 2011

Summary

1. The following observations are of general applicability to the Army and the Australian Defence Force:

- a. Make war simply.
- b. Executing operations in war is more difficult than conceiving and planning them.
- c. Seek to have as much unregulated time as possible in the battle rhythm.
- d. Small headquarters are efficient and thoughtful headquarters.
- e. It is too risky to not accept substantial risk in war.
- f. Contemporary soldiers have a distorted and fanciful perception of wartime soldiering.
- g. It is possible to kill your soldiers with kindness.
- h. Mission command has become a dogma.
- i. It is not under the strain of battle or hardship that discipline breaks down, but through long periods of sloth and inactivity.

j. The Taliban is a poor enemy and provides a poor measure of the quality of the Army's discipline, skills, equipment and tactics.

k. Understanding the mission, its purpose and its context are vital.

l. Rapid release of known insurgents is the single most important factor in the population's lack of confidence in the Government in Uruzgan Province.

Observations

2. **Make war simply.** The Task Force's experience in Afghanistan reinforced the truism that there are so many variables at play in war that war is beyond human comprehension and is beyond human powers of prediction. Yet much of the Australian doctrine for warfare emphasises effecting circumstances and things in rather specific and precise ways. Australian warfare doctrine also suggests that synchronising the actions of one's troops and the effects they cause is also very important. Causing specific effects assumes causality and continuity along the lines that if A occurs and then B occurs, that A caused B. Such determinism is rarely evident in warfare except in the most banal of examples.

3. The experience of the Third Mentoring Task Force suggests that the doctrine of synchronisation and effects might have limited application. The Task Force found that the doctrine of synchronisation and effects demands perfect understanding of variables. This demand for precise knowledge tends to create a demand for specific information, which in turn tends to lead to more information gatherers and analysers. Despite larger staff's the demand for greater clarity is impossible to satisfy. The doctrine of synchronisation and effects, therefore, exposes the knowledge-dependent practitioner to pre-emption and surprise by an enemy willing to act in the absence of a precise understanding of the situation. Surprise and pre-emption make



previous knowledge of a situation irrelevant, thereby equalising each side's knowledge of the circumstances at that moment, or even tilting the advantage in favour of the one who acted first. The Task Force's experience, where the enemy's advantage of anonymity almost guaranteed him the initiative, drilled home this important lesson. Except in fairly banal cases where a disproportionately large amount of energy and intelligence resources are applied to gaining knowledge about a particular target, the doctrine of synchronisation and effects falls apart.

4. Rather than trying to piece together an understanding of the overwhelming number of variables at play in Uruzgan Province, Mentoring Task Force commanders and their staffs acted to impose a stabilising condition on events. Drawing from a detailed study of successful counterinsurgencies the Task Force sought simply to get the Afghan Army to weaken the insurgents such that the people would be left with no alternative but to collaborate with the agencies of the Afghan Government (however good or bad they might have been). Rather than seeking to manipulate events or change the beliefs and attitudes of local people, the goal was simply to affect behaviour. ...

5. There were strong indicators that the approach seemed to work. In the absence of specific information, repeated action (simply conceived and planned) in insurgent controlled areas regularly generated its own information and opportunities. Persistent presence in insurgent controlled and contested areas, in its own right, limited insurgent freedom of action and gave the insurgents and the population a sense of inevitability of Afghan Government dominance. ...

6. Executing operations in war is more difficult than conceiving and planning them. The simplicity of the logic of warfare does not make warfare easy. There is no silver bullet in the form of a theory or process that makes successful conduct of warfare assured. In this case, eliminating or changing the behaviour of those that would wish to violently coerce the local people to do other than collaborate with the authorities of the Afghan Government is not a trivial problem. In war the real difficulty is in the doing, not the planning. ...

7. The Mentoring Task Force commanders and staff shunned the processes that define contemporary battle rhythms, such as targeting cycles. They worked on the assumption that hard thinking and personal example have the greatest effect on the quality and correctness of action. ...

8. Whether an operation was the correct one to do at that moment, or the extent to which it was well-synchronised within itself and with other events, proved a minor concern. De-coupled plans meant that coordination of activities once underway was more important than synchronising things, events and outcomes in advance. Creating opportunities, recognising them as such, and rapidly seizing them was more important than prediction of decisive points and meeting milestones. The Task Force's experience seems to indicate that emphasising precision, prediction and synchronisation is unnecessary. An experimental or explorative, trial and error approach is of much greater relevance and value in war.

...

10. Seek to have as much unregulated time as possible in the battle rhythm. Acceptance of the unpredictability of war and the effects of the fog and friction of war demands great flexibility. Opportunities and threats tend not to conform to preordained "decision cycles". Fortunately, the human mind is capable of making decisions in far more sophisticated ways than the flawed concept of

an iterative and cyclical OODA loop that has dominated Western military thought for so long. ...

...

12. There was no apparent loss of shared knowledge of the situation as a result of the infrequency of scheduled meetings, briefings and working groups. In fact, quite the opposite occurred. ... In a tight battle rhythm it is easy for staff members to get caught up in a cycle of preparing for the next meeting, leaving little time for reflection and problem solving. ...

13. Small headquarters are efficient and thoughtful headquarters. The headquarters of the Third Mentoring Task Force was comparatively quite small ... It also had very few field rank officers, and the vast majority of the positions were filled by the lowest rank allowable The headquarters broke the contemporary trend toward a continental model of several functional staff cells and was organised using a more traditional model based on two staff "stove pipes"; operations (to deal with problems of doing) and administration (to deal with problems of things and people). ...

14. Larger headquarters divided up into the various continental staff sections necessarily demand more information and analysis, and require a greater amount of energy to keep everyone informed and aligned. These things place burdens on time that principle staff would otherwise use for thinking and solving problems. ...

15. Some argue that the trend toward larger headquarters in contemporary units and formations is a necessary or inevitable function of the greater complexity of modern warfare or because contemporary units and formations are more powerful and complex themselves. The idea that contemporary warfare is more complex is a commonly made assertion with very little evidence to support it. ... The comparatively small headquarters with few field ranking officers proved highly efficient and very swift. The judgment and talent of the two principle staff officers proved to be the most important and decisive factor affecting the quality of the headquarters. The ability of the junior staff to coordinate routine matters, provide timely assessments and provide the detail for plans and orders was the next critical factor.

16. Some would contend that the great complexity of contemporary warfare and contemporary units necessitates robust planning and execution tools. ... Planners ought not to assume that an operation will reach a decisive point or a forecast decision point. To do so is to assume that another opportunity for success won't present, and that the enemy and others will act rationally and according to a design. The strict use of planning tools also tends to come from the assumption that the use of a procedural "handrail" constitutes rigour and discipline, leading to more prudent execution of a plan. The notion is illusory ... It is the quality of execution of a plan and the quality of the judgments made in the dynamic and fluid circumstances of execution that has proven most important ... No plan survives first contact...

...

19. It is too risky to not accept risk in war. ...

...

23. If the most important risk assessment in war is whether the prize is worth the potential cost, then the management and assessment of hazards must take on a different form than the identification



and mitigation of hazards under the orthodox workplace risk management model. ...

24. Workplace risk management processes are also suboptimal in warfare because they tend to reduce a commander's and staff's awareness of weak signals of looming threats. ...

25. **Contemporary soldiers have a distorted and fanciful perception of wartime soldiering.** One of the great frustrations for the Third Mentoring Task Force was the very different standards of appearance, fieldcraft and field discipline expected by the more senior officers and warrant officers and everyone else. Almost all soldiers, including many sergeants, came to the operation with a distorted image of how a soldier ought to behave, how he should appear, and how his superiors ought to treat him when at war. Contemporary soldiers expect that deployment on an operation entitles them to grow out their hair, go unshaven, question orders and wear their uniform as they please (or not at all). Soldiers seemed to think that standards relating to matters such as fieldcraft, field discipline, and the maintenance and accounting for stores and equipment are normally relaxed during war. In fact, some soldiers perceived certain expectations regarding good fieldcraft as unnecessary *rules*.

26. Soldier's perceptions about appearance, fieldcraft and field discipline seemed to be a function of stereotypical images of Special Forces soldiers, ... some soldiers believed quite passionately that an Australian soldier is expected to "muck up" on operations. It seemed as though many soldiers felt that they were almost obliged to live up to a rogue, irreverent and scruffy stereotype ... and that their leaders ought to tolerate these things. These distorted notions were often reinforced by junior leaders who were similarly attracted to the romance of the stereotypes, or wanted to avoid confronting soldiers about matters generally perceived as petty. ...

27. ... There is a fine line between relaxed expectations of appearance, plain carelessness and just being a slob.

28. Several soldiers stated ... that they expected that when deployed on operations a soldier should be allowed to do pretty-much whatever he wants in his down time, and need only "switch on" when on a task. It seemed as though they treated the patrol base as the equivalent of their "home"; a place where the Army should not touch them. Any task seemed to be perceived as the "workplace"; a place where soldiers subject themselves more willingly to the authority of superiors.

29. Fashion seems to be unduly important to the contemporary soldier. ...

...

31. ... The extent that a soldier will dismiss the advice of an experienced senior non-commissioned officer or an officer is alarming. Reinforcing this trend is the tendency for senior non-commissioned officers, officers and warrant officers to not confront a soldier in these circumstances.

...

35. ... a trend of over-familiarity is the primary cause of the current loose and surly attitudes of soldiers. Contemporary officers, warrant

officers and senior non-commissioned officers tend to encourage relatively high levels of familiarity. ... Performance seems to count for less than how the individual is perceived. Therefore, hollow rhetoric, flattery and unwarranted praise are the tools of the contemporary junior leader. The use of nicknames and first names between junior officers, warrant officers class 2, and enlisted men is so common as to be the norm. Junior leaders (even many warrant officers) are reluctant to chip soldiers for minor infractions for fear of how their soldiers might perceive such actions. Similarly, many junior leaders seem to regard checks and inspections as demonstrations of distrust towards their subordinates.

36. ... The young leaders pick and choose which orders they will enforce, thereby undermining the authority of their superiors ... Consequently, soldiers walk all over their junior leaders and the junior leaders are either accepting or naïve to the fact. Consequently, senior commanders become distrustful of their junior leaders.

37. **It is possible to kill your soldiers with kindness.**

...

39. Well-motivated efforts to make the soldier's lot more pleasant in peace and in war have made our soldiers quite sensitive to fairly minor trials and adversity. ...

40. In the most extreme cases gradual erosion of standards of field discipline and fieldcraft have resulted in the deaths of Australian soldiers. There are examples throughout Australia's commitment in Afghanistan of soldiers sunbathing in tactical positions, manning single-man piquets as a matter of routine ... The comfort of the soldier and gratifying his immediate desires has taken on an absurd level of importance, which is beyond all reasonable expectations.

...

42. The current attitude of soldiers is also a function of the Australian Defence Force's nasty tendency to attend to the comforts and protection of its troops almost at the expense of achieving the mission ...

...

44. **Mission command has become a dogma.** Young leaders misunderstand the concept of mission command. There is a fairly dogmatic view that mission command is as simple as telling the subordinate what effect to achieve, resourcing him and then letting him do it however he chooses. Of course, this simplistic view is not entirely wrong. Somewhere along the line though, many junior leaders never picked up the broader and important subtleties of the idea. ... There is almost a sense among many junior leaders that the decisions, actions and advice provided by the "man on the ground" are sacrosanct and beyond question by superiors. They transfer the idea of mission command from purely tactical matters (which is the only context in which it is useful) through to decisions about dress, equipment carriage, soldier administration, deviation from established regulations, orders and more. ...

45. **It is not under the strain of battle or hardship that discipline breaks down, but through long periods of sloth and inactivity.** ...



46. Similarly, soldiers left in small groups on their own under junior and inexperienced leadership tend to develop inward-looking and narrow-minded attitudes. ...

47. **The Taliban is a poor enemy and provides a poor measure of the quality of the Army's discipline, skills, equipment and tactics.** ... The simple fact is that Taliban tactics are very rudimentary and are very much limited by his circumstances. His advantages are many, but are consistent with the advantages held by insurgents throughout the 20th Century. The idea that the Taliban is somehow more adaptive than other enemies is flawed and is not supported by evidence. His skills are very poor, particularly his marksmanship. The Army would do well to demythologise the Taliban lest it enter the next war against a far more capable enemy and get a very nasty shock. ...

...

51. **Rapid release of known insurgents is the single most important factor in the population's lack of confidence in the Government in Uruzgan Province.** Detention of suspected insurgents is a fraught matter. On the one hand, it is important that justice is seen to be done and that innocent people are not detained unfairly. Unlawful

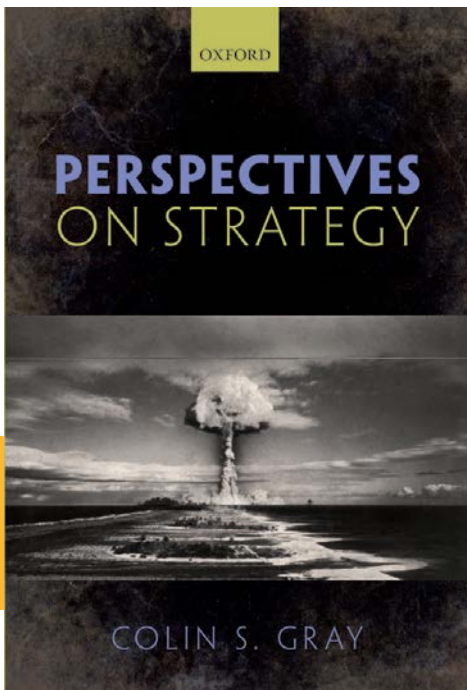
and unfair detention leads to ill-feeling that feeds an insurgency. On the other hand, detaining insurgents only to release them shortly after erodes the confidence of local people in their Government and security forces. They fear intimidation from the released insurgent ... The people of Uruzgan Province, even those that are supportive of the Government, rarely inform on insurgents because insurgents are normally released soon after detention. The difficulty in holding detainees is a significant, if not decisive, impediment in the conduct of the war. ...

Conclusion

...

54. The soldiers of the Task Force have a great deal to be proud of. Nonetheless, there are some trends in the manner of junior leadership and soldier behaviour/expectations that deserve the attention of the senior leaders of the Army and the Australian Defence Force. While some might argue that these trends simply represent the zeitgeist or spirit of the age, they run counter to the good order and discipline of a professional army.

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SURROGATE: WHY OPERATIONAL ART ADOPTED STRATEGY



Aaron Jackson

Since its first issue the pages of this journal have contained a lively debate about the relevance and place of operational art and the operational level of war. This debate was triggered by an earlier publication, *Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy*, by Justin Kelly and Mike Brennan.^[i] Thus far the debate has focused on whether operational art has ‘devoured’ strategy and on the proper place operational art should occupy relative to strategy and tactics. Participants have reached conclusions ranging from advocacy of an operational level of war as a useful intermediary between strategic and tactical levels, to its abandonment altogether.

This article offers an alternative perspective on that debate. Arguing convincingly within *Alien* that the scope of operational art has expanded to include formerly strategic functions such as campaign planning, Kelly and Brennan assert that this has occurred because of a mixture of bureaucratic reasons and a misunderstanding of the nature of the concept of ‘operational art’ itself. This article argues that this expansion has instead been largely due to attempts to implement what Eliot Cohen called ‘the ‘normal’ theory of civil-military relations’.^[ii] This theory posits that statesmen should determine the desired strategic end state and then leave it up to military professionals to plan and conduct the military activities necessary to reach that end state.

Attempts to implement this theory have brought about an artificial distinction between the strategic and operational roles of statesmen and military practitioners. This in turn has necessitated an expanded conceptualisation of operational art that allows military practitioners to continue to legitimately discuss aspects of strategy (including campaign planning) that would otherwise be perceived as beyond their remit. Operational art is therefore not some kind of strategy-devouring alien, as Kelly and Brennan assert, but instead is akin to

a surrogate that has kept these aspects of strategy alive by adopting them as its own. Until the prevailing understanding of civil-military relations changes to enable senior military professionals to openly influence national strategy and, inversely, to allow statesmen to legitimately reach down and influence operational and sometimes even tactical events when the strategic situation warrants, the academic debate about operational art and the operational level of war is likely to have little impact on practice.

The debate about operational art

In *Alien* Kelly and Brennan offer a history of the theoretical development of operational art from the 19th century to the present, which given the subject of this paper is worth summarising. The need for operational art arose in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, during which the size of armies grew to such a scale that they were no longer manageable by a single commander. Beginning in France with the *Levee en Masse*, conscription enabled European states to mobilise increasing numbers of personnel. Concurrently, the industrial revolution enabled these increasingly large armies to be equipped, sustained, supplied and manoeuvred.^[iii]

This increase in scale created two major problems for military commanders. The first was the need to orchestrate the movement of military forces beyond the immediate geography and direct control of the commander. The second was that the increased size of military forces meant that defeating an enemy army in a single battle would no longer lead to the enemy’s overall defeat. To address these problems and ensure that strategic objectives could be met the need arose to link several tactical actions together as a campaign. This need for prolonged campaigns inevitably changed the relationship between politics, strategy and tactics. Both theoretical development and practical advances in this regard were most comprehensive in Germany and, from the early 20th century, the Soviet Union.

It was theorists in the latter that gave ‘operational art’ its name during the 1920s. They developed this concept in a very specific

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context: the need to defend the Soviet Union against external threats originating almost entirely from Europe. The Soviet conceptualisation of operational art was a narrow one, focused on the eventual annihilation of an enemy's forces through a planned sequence of tactical actions aimed at their progressive attrition. Importantly, campaign planning remained a function of strategy, with operational art limited to the linking of tactical actions within the framework of the (strategic) campaign plan.[iv]

This understanding of 'operations' was not explicit within English speaking militaries until the publication of the 1982 edition of US Army Field Manual (FM) 100-5. According to Kelly and Brennan, discussion within this publication constituted a 'perversion' of the Soviet conceptualisation of operational art.[v] This is because FM 100-5 discussed 'the operational level of war' rather than 'operational art' (a term that was not introduced to English speaking militaries until the 1986 edition of FM 100-5). This difference in terminology was subtle but very important as it led to a conceptual separation of the operational from the strategic. The subsequent expansion of the newly delineated operational level within the doctrine of English-speaking militaries led to it encompassing campaign planning. This led in turn to it 'reducing the political leadership to the role of 'strategic sponsors', [which] quite specifically widened the gap between politics and warfare'.[vi]

The core of Kelly's and Brennan's argument is that this expanded role for the operational level of war and operational art has not only dislocated military operations from strategy, but also from the original context in which Soviet theorists were writing about operational art. 'The result', they argue, 'has been a well-demonstrated ability to win battles that have not always contributed to strategic success'. To remedy this, they suggest returning to the conceptual roots of operational art as limited to the sequencing of tactical actions. Campaign planning should be returned to the remit of strategic leadership and involve input from political as well as military strategic leaders.

A series of articles since published in *The Journal of Military Operations* has significantly expanded the scope of the debate about the role and place of operational art.[viii] In extremis, William F. Owen declared that 'the operational level of war does not exist' and made an argument for its removal from doctrine altogether. At the other end of the spectrum, John Kiszely advocated maintaining the status quo, concluding that because doctrine is flexibly applied at the discretion of the practitioner, the operational level is better off being included in doctrine and used, altered or set aside as circumstances dictate.

Kelly once again entered the fray, asserting 'it is not possible to publish a theory of 'larger unit operations' or of planning 'major operations'. These concepts are entirely subjective and do not lend themselves to objective analysis'.[ix] His thinking had clearly evolved since *Alien* and his article viewed operational art as a subjective response to a particular situation in which the Soviets found themselves, which is not suitable to any other situation. Finally, in the most recent contribution to the debate (so far) Nathan W. Toronto asserted that operational art is appropriate in situations where military engagements are relatively large in scale and where there is a relatively longer time delay between tactical action and strategic effect. In other situations it may not be suitable.

Why the scope of operational art expanded

Despite the ongoing academic debate, the status quo established

by the 1982 and 1986 editions of FM 100-5 seems likely to remain extant within doctrine and practice. The collective understanding of operational art and the operational level of war is also likely to remain unchanged within Western militaries. Accordingly, the intent of this article is not to continue the debate about whether to retain or remove the operational level from doctrine and planning, although that debate is worth continuing and Kelly in particular has raised several points worthy of further development. Instead the intent here is to explain why the scope of operational art has expanded into areas such as campaign planning (leading Kelly and Brennan to assert that it has 'devoured' strategy), to offer an insight into the main barrier that will prevent the theoretical debate from transitioning into practice and to briefly examine how things might look if this barrier was removed.

In his article in *The Journal of Military Operations* Kelly explained the bureaucratic rationale for the operational level of war being included in the 1982 edition of FM 100-5:

It has been explained to this author by a member of the writing team of FM 100-5 (1982) that the final draft of the publication did not include mention of the operational level of war. However, the meeting held to consider the final draft included representatives from the US Army War College, Army Command and General Staff College and the branch schools. It was clear to this group that War College taught strategy and the branches taught tactics but this left the staff college without a defined jurisdiction. The operational level of war emerged as a consequence.[x]

This was different to the reason stated in *Alien*, where it was asserted that:

The US chain of command resulting from the Goldwater-Nichols Act had established the role of the combatant commanders-in-chief as joint war fighters...defining their role in the process of conducting a war necessarily involved defining their inputs and outputs. Thus the idea of an operational level of war charged with campaign planning met a bureaucratic need— establishment of jurisdictional definition among an influential group of senior officers.[xi]

Given the size of the US military bureaucracy and the sheer number of influential stakeholders involved, it is likely that both bureaucratic reasons cited by Kelly (and Brennan) hold a good deal of truth. This would by no means be the first time that bureaucratic compromise has resulted in conceptually sub-optimal doctrine!

A different bureaucratic reason helps to explain why an expanded conceptualisation of the operational level of war, which includes aspects traditionally constituting part of strategy, is likely to remain within doctrine now that it is there. This additional reason is perhaps best encapsulated in Sir Basil Liddell-Hart's dictum that 'the only thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind is to get an old one out'.[xii] Kelly and Brennan are right that the operational level of war has expanded and become thoroughly entrenched in Western military thought. Due to inertia alone it is likely to be very hard to get military practitioners to accept a radical change to their collective understanding of the operational level and what it encompasses, at least in the short term.

As encompassing as the bureaucratic rationale for retaining the operational level is, there is another more fundamental reason why the expanded conceptualisation is not going anywhere. This reason is the prevailing cultural norm of civil-military relations in Western

democracies. The nature of this norm was famously laid out by Samuel Huntington in *The Soldier and the State*; however the more recent writing of Eliot Cohen offers a better summary. Describing 'a simplified secondhand version' of Huntington's model as 'the 'normal' theory of civil-military relations', Cohen determined that this model calls for a sharp distinction between statesmen and military professionals. In line with this distinction, the former ought to be responsible for political matters, including the setting of the desired strategic end state, while the latter ought to be responsible for the execution of all military activities necessary to achieve this end state. Although Cohen offers an excellent critique of the normal theory, ultimately proving both that it does not function in practice and that it is undesirable that it should, he also concludes that it remains the system of civil-military relations that many Western political and military leaders strive towards achieving.[xiii]

It is not, as Kelly and Brennan assert, misconceptions of operational art as an operational level of war that have reduced 'political leadership to the role of 'strategic sponsors'' and 'widened the gap between politics and warfare'. Instead, perceptions of what constitutes the most desirable model of civil-military relations at the highest levels of Western democracies, and attempts to implement this model, have driven a wedge between politics and statesmen on one hand and military professionals and the conduct of warfare on the other. Operational art and the operational level of war entered Western military parlance in an environment where this gap already existed, and their expansion relative to strategy reflects and reinforces but does not create this gap.

So where to next?

Over the longer term military professionals should take subtle actions aimed at eventually creating a more ideal state of civil-military relations. This will require much tact, to ensure that efforts to 'educate up' (which are likely to be necessary to bring about such a change) have the desired effect rather than being an unwanted nuisance. Furthermore, exactly how to achieve the desired change will most likely require a unique approach dependant upon national circumstances and the personalities of key leaders on both sides of the fence. But such efforts are likely to be worthwhile because, as history shows, better strategy development accompanies a more ideal state of civil-military relations. What may constitute a more ideal state of civil-military relations is therefore worth elaborating before discussing the effect that this would likely have on the practice of operational art.

In an ideal world statesmen *and* senior military commanders would each play a role in both strategy and operational art, with statesmen heavily involved in the former and only selectively intervening in the latter. Military professionals would be involved in all aspects of both strategy and operational art—including establishing the strategic end state, a function currently reserved for statesmen. Applying an ideal model of civil-military relations would therefore mean accepting that the division of responsibility between statesmen and senior military professionals is necessarily blurred. Although the civilian statesman must always have the final say, it would be legitimate—indeed desirable—for senior military professionals to contribute to all aspects of strategy development, bluntly and especially so if the professional's view conflicts with the statesman's. In such an

atmosphere operational art would once again be able to play the more limited (and tactically-focused) role that the Soviets originally conceived for it. This would be because operational art would no longer need to incorporate aspects of strategy (e.g. campaign planning) to allow senior military professionals to legitimately address them.

In the short term, however, attempts to 'walk the line' between theoretical desires and the practical requirements of civil-military relations are likely to persist. An expanded operational level of war that includes campaign planning may indeed be a theoretically perverted model; but it is also a pragmatic necessity given this situation. Military practitioners need to be able to plan and conduct military activities regardless of the prevailing state of civil-military relations, which means accepting a lack of input by statesmen beyond the expression of a desired end state. This necessitates doing what Kiszely proposed: keeping the current (expanded) conceptualisation of operational art in doctrine and selectively applying it as necessary to suit individual circumstances. This is not the first time that Western militaries have had to adapt and overcome using a sub-optimal but nevertheless workable solution; no doubt it will not be the last.

Conclusion

A debate about the relevance of operational art and the operational level of war to contemporary Western militaries is worth having. But the outcome of this debate is only likely to lead to an improvement in military conduct if it first leads to changes in military doctrine. As things stand this is unlikely to happen, not because of anything inherent to the debate itself, but because of the prevailing Western cultural norm of civil-military relations, in which the separation of politics from military conduct is seen as both normal and desirable. According to this norm, civilian political leaders should stay away from the military aspects of campaign planning, and military leaders should steer clear of political issues, including those that relate directly to the establishment of national strategy. It is this norm, not the development of an operational 'level of war', that has driven a wedge between strategy and tactics. Something more than tactics is certainly required of military officers, but in the current system discussing the most fundamental elements of national strategy remains all but off limits.

In light of this wedge operational art should not be viewed as some kind of strategy-devouring alien, as Kelly and Brennan imagine it. Instead operational art should be imagined as a surrogate that has kept certain aspects of military strategy—campaign planning in particular—alive by adopting them as its own. Before the academic debate over the rightful role and place of operational art can have any meaningful result, the prevailing understanding of civil-military relations and the respective roles of statesmen and senior military leaders needs to change. It must be better understood that civil-military relations are inherently messy. Senior military leaders need to be able to influence national strategy just as, inversely, statesmen are well within their remit to reach down and influence operational and sometimes even tactical events when the strategic situation warrants it. Only once the prevailing norm of civil-military relations has been changed will operational art be able to give up its surrogate role and return the aspects of strategy it has allegedly 'devoured' back to their rightful parent.

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The views expressed in this paper are the author's own and are not necessarily those of the Australian Defence Organisation or any part thereof.

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'THE OPERATIONAL' IN THE INFORMATION AGE



Phillip Jones

This journal has hosted an intriguing discussion on the operational level of war. This conversation has focused on whether an operational level exists and the subsequent question of what is its nature. This article hopes to contribute to that discussion. The article's bottom line is that there is a level of war between the tactical and strategic, a so-called operational level. This article derives this conclusion through an examination of changes in the nature of war over ages and the effect of those changes on war's practice. The article concludes with a suggestion for an approach to the operational level, one befitting the Information Age and intended to foster further discussion.

The levels of war

An operational level of war exists within an ontology that also includes strategic and tactical levels of war. The existence of strategic and tactical levels is widely accepted, though we continue to debate their nature. The reason for this debate is that the levels of war are human constructs created to help us understand and act in order to achieve our goals. They are patterns or structures of thought and action or, in other words, are schema for understanding and reacting to war. Strategy and tactics are distinct schemas because we recognize that different concepts and practices are required at these two levels of activity. Likewise, a third construct or schema, positioned between strategy and tactics, should exist if there is a gap in understanding and practicing war between strategy and tactics. It has been the growing recognition of that gap that has driven the conceptualization and development of the operational level.

The gap between strategy and tactics

Discussion of an operational level of war normally starts with the Napoleonic Era, when human advances allowed the production of large, national armies. Although it is dangerous to generalize, prior to the Napoleonic period, wars were often small, almost one-act affairs fought by single armies in a solitary campaign consisting of an approach to a decisive, culminating battle followed by subsequent actions to secure or exploit the results of that battle. The opposing armies were relatively similar, homogenous and small enough that their resultant battle could be managed by single individuals, often the sovereign or warlord protagonists who were to benefit from the results of the war. A prime example is the Norman conquest of England in 1066. This war consisted of the gathering of a limited variety and quantity of resources into two similar armies, a mutual approach and the culminating Battle of Hastings which occurred over such a small space that William and Harold could personally control each army. Once William won the battle, the remainder of the war consisted of marching through England to secure the various parts of the country. These wars were restricted to this model by the limited capabilities available to collect and sustain combat power over time and distance. Industrial constraints limited the quantity and type of arms available. Agricultural and transportation constraints limited the ability to sustain armies over time and distance. Manpower was limited by the necessity of leaders to manage and conduct agriculture.

Under these conditions, strategy and tactics, as they existed, were tied tightly together. Strategy generated the resources and brought them to the field. Tactics won or lost the battle that ensured or denied the strategic outcome.

War remained relatively unchanged up to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. At that time, social changes such as nationalism and class identity made available the manpower to create much larger armies. Additional social and technical advances facilitated the translation of this greater manpower into actual, functional armies as well as allowing their sustainment over greater

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distances and periods of time. These same advances also provided greater differentiation and specialization within those armies, such as the various forms of cavalry and infantry as well as effective artillery. These advances cascaded into changes in the deployment of these forces, including such novelties as the corps system, mixed unit formations, and multiple avenues of approach. The overarching effect was to create much more resilient armies; ones that could march over multiple routes before massing to fight but beyond the ability of just one man to control. Napoleon's Ulm campaign consisted of independent French columns making wide approach marches. It also saw Napoleon destroy an Austrian army and occupy Vienna, the enemy's capital, but still having to continue the war to eventually fight a major winter battle at Austerlitz. Furthermore, Napoleon lost in Russia exactly because he could not translate tactical successes at Borodino and occupation of Moscow into a strategic victory.

As stated above, it was operations such as these that initiated consideration of a possible level of war or schema between tactics and strategy. Students of war saw that protagonists had to tie multiple tactical actions together to achieve strategic outcomes. Those students also saw commanders needing to synchronize the actions and contributions of increasingly differing capabilities. They saw the opening of cracks between tactical results and strategic outcomes.

Napoleon fought his wars just prior to the cusp between the Agricultural Age and Industrial. As the world accelerated into the industrial age, those cracks would widen to inescapable gaps. The Industrial Age saw an explosion in human advancement with subsequent effects on war. Armies continued to grow. Existing capabilities improved and new ones emerged. Technical enablers included railroad, internal combustion engine, agricultural tractor, steam ship, torpedo, airplane, recoilless artillery, smokeless powder, machinegun, dynamite, barbed wire, telegraph, and thousands more. These changes further complicated war, ensuring greater resilience, creating greater challenges and, ultimately, widening the gap between tactics and strategy.

Although earlier wars hinted at this gap—von Moltke and the Prussians achieved absolute tactical victory in the Franco-Prussian War but still practically stumbled for months longer trying to achieve strategic ends—it was World War I, and especially the Western Front, where the gap became most evident. Through four years of war, neither the Allies nor the Entente were able to translate major battles into strategic success. The Germans demonstrated this most clearly in the last year of the war when they were unable to translate the tremendous tactical successes of their 1918 Offensive into any strategic outcome. The gap between tactical results and strategic outcomes has continued long after World War I. Witness the difficulties of the Wehrmacht in Russia to turn tactical success into strategic victory and the oft-mentioned spectacle of the US Army in Vietnam winning every battle yet losing the war.

Several post-World War I thinkers recognized this gap and the need for a schema to address it. An example is JFC Fuller, who discussed "design" in his 1925 book, *The Foundations of the Science of War*.^[i] However, perhaps due to their revolutionary perspective freeing them from preconceived biases or due to their maneuver-focused experiences of the Eastern Front in WWI, the Russian Civil War and the Russo-Polish War, Soviet theorists took the

inter-war lead in exploring the nature of this gap and proposing a schema for resolving its challenges. Their work had two unfortunate consequences. The first is that they provided the accepted name for this new schema, the operational level, thus forever forcing authors to juggle the term "operational level" and the broader term "operations". The more significant consequence was to make the operational level synonymous with a specific scale of operations and a new, associated organizational echelon. Although early Soviet operational level theorists emphasized the necessity of expanding operations beyond the battlefield and including such factors as logistics, management and morale, what the Soviets handed down was an approach that mirrored tactics but on a larger scale. This perspective has stuck to much of the conventional perspectives of the operational level of war and has rightfully led to questions as to whether a new level of war is truly required. Making the operational level interchangeable with a scale and organizational echelon has also limited its conceptual development as the world has progressed from the Industrial Age and into the Information Age.

The impact of the Information Age

Human advancement has continued to accelerate. While in the Industrial Age, advances focused on magnifying human physical abilities, in the Information Age advancement has concentrated on cognitive abilities, flowing into improvements in physical capabilities. This has included the free flow of information across the globe, initially through such means as radio, movies and television and now through the internet. This information flow has had tremendous impact upon war. As with the Industrial Age, advances comprising the Information Age have provided new and improved capabilities. More significantly, these advances have blurred the definition of those who prosecute war.

Clausewitz defined war as an "...act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."^[ii] Will is an envisioned end state with a path to reach that end state. Will is a common condition; all individuals and groups possess will. In a resource constrained environment, i.e. the real world, conflicting individual and group wills are inevitable. For this reason, the use of force to achieve will has been and will continue to be a constant element of the human condition.

The Information Age has had a tremendous impact upon human will, expanding our ability to envision end states and our ability to plan and execute paths to those end states. The Information Age is global. It reaches the most remote parts of humanity. Witness the profusion of cell phones across the Third World. Newly available information allows new and expanded end state visions; no longer are we restricted to envisioning within our limited, geographical or experiential confines. The new age allows us to find and interact with others who share our vision. This provides greater opportunities for individuals and groups to combine resources in pursuit of will. Conversely, free flowing information also allows us to find and interact with others who possess conflicting wills, actual or perceived, increasing the opportunity for conflict. The Information Age has reduced the costs of traditional tools of conflict to the point where individuals and groups can easily acquire them. It has provided new tools to impact others, such as the World Wide Web. The new age has reduced traditional protections such as borders, walls, and physical distance, making populations more vulnerable to conflict.



This vulnerability could take the nature of physical attack managed and resourced via international, information pathways as occurred on 9/11, or via information campaigns such those as conducted by the North Vietnamese via the international press.

What does this mean for today's practitioners of war? This question is already being explored through numerous perspectives. A contributor to this journal, retired General Rupert Smith, contributed one of the earliest perspectives in his book *The Utility of War*. [iii] Others have proposed theories such as Fourth Generation War, New Wars, NetWars, Hybrid War, Revolutionary War, and others. The general affect is that the Information Age has caused a blurring of boundaries and a democratization of conflict. Where traditionally wars, to be successful, had to be prosecuted by armies organized by states, today informal groups and even individuals can prosecute conflict across the global stage. Where traditionally, the military generally assumed sole responsibility for prosecuting wars, today success requires broad governmental and non-governmental participation and synchronization. Where traditionally, war consisted of protagonists facing each other across a defined front line, today operations and resulting effects may occur anywhere, brought not just by a fifth column but also via a Wi-Fi. Where traditionally, wars had distinct beginnings and ends, today they may exist over protracted periods and be barely perceptible. Where traditionally, wars involved relatively monolithic protagonists, today protagonists may contain within themselves many groups and individuals possessing their own wills and having the means to effectively and independently pursue those wills, even in opposition to their overarching protagonist and making these internal groups and individuals a necessary concern, to be attacked when they belong to the enemy or defended when they belong to us.

And the bottom line for practitioners? All of these and additional changes lead to increased difficulty in linking strategy to tactics and tactics to strategy, widening the gap between tactical results and strategic outcomes, and increasing the need for a new schema; the need for an operational level of war.

A proposed approach to the Operational Level

There is a huge difference between recognizing the necessity of something and subsequently describing that something. Furthermore, the effects of an improper definition may have serious, negative consequences on further attempts at understanding and definition. Perhaps, if the Soviets had developed a more functional concept for the operational level, there would not today be the amount of debate over whether there is one.

In hopes of catalyzing further discussion, this article will provide a hypothetical approach to the operational level. I will start by stating what a schema, called the operational level, should accomplish. It should cross the gap between strategy and tactics. In other words, it should provide the cognitive structure and processes for translating strategic goals into tactical plans and tactical results into strategic assessments and outcomes. The operational level should perform this translation taking into consideration the new myriad of friendly, foe and neutral participants.

To continue with our Clausewitzian definition of war, policy and

resulting strategy, at a very esoteric level, involve the will. Each deal with questions of: What are our wills? How important are they? What groups and individuals are we dependent upon to achieve our wills and what are their wills? Whose wills may conflict with ours? What resources would we want to commit to promulgating that conflict, to achieving our will or denying the will of our antagonist? Tactics are the actions we perform within space and time to progress towards our will. Tactics may be a battle that leads to the occupation of an enemy's capitol or the publication of information over the internet designed to weaken an opponent's morale.

The wills that drive policy and strategy have a common trait. As visions, they exist within the minds of the protagonists. Therefore, forcing a will requires changing the mind, whether of an individual or of a group. Even in the only war where nuclear weapons have been used, those weapons were used as a message to change the minds or will of the targeted country. The message was that further fighting would lead to unacceptable destruction. When the first message failed, a second was dropped and shortly thereafter, the desired outcome was achieved; the warring country modified its will and surrendered

In the information age, this analogy of war as an exchange of information through tactical actions, including combat, is very apt. It leads us to conclude that the schema that closes the gap between strategy and tactics should support the most effective and efficient creation and transmittal of appropriate and synergistic messages necessary to impact the many wills—enemy, friendly, and neutral—associated with the war or conflict. Another word to describe this schema is "narrative".

Narrative is not a new term within military operations and is particularly associated with information operations within counterinsurgency operations. Additionally, it is similar to the concept of design mentioned above. This hypothetical approach elevates the narrative into the centralizing organizer that serves to coordinate the actions, lethal and non-lethal, of all actors. Narrative is different from design in that a narrative recognizes that in this age it is no longer possible to exercise sufficient, top-down control over all the elements contributing to strategic outcomes. Rather, a narrative approach implies drawing internal and external elements to itself, enabling and animating them to contribute to strategic outcomes. Finally, despite its inherently non-violent connotation, a narrative does not exclude combat. It may be a narrative exclusively of combat, but it will logically link planned combat though to strategic outcomes.

The narrative approach comprises the threads that project from the current strategic state to the intended state. This may be divided into sequential or simultaneous chapters/campaigns logically building upon the results of previous efforts. An operational art built from the concept of a narrative would prepare commanders, staffs and others responsible for the operational level to think through the depth of the operation as opposed to becoming engrossed in the first battle. The art would prepare operational level practitioners to create effective, encompassing, continuous, synchronized, understandable, measurable, complete and convincing progressions to strategic ends. Additionally, practitioners would be trained to monitor tactical results in regards to their intended and actual support to the progression of the narrative and make subsequent decisions to continue or modify the narrative.



Policy drives the narrative, which then provides harmonized guidance for choosing and executing tactical actions. The results of those actions then inform where in the narrative one is and whether that narrative remains viable or must change. That, in turn, informs the sustainment or modification of the original policy.

Conclusion

Human advancement continues to makes war more complicated. As

a result of this increased complexity, a gap between the accepted schemas of strategy and tactics has formed, making it more difficult to link strategic goals with tactical plans and tactical results to strategic outcomes. This widening gap implies the need for a new schema that bridges strategy and tactics, the operational level. It is logical for us to create an operational level but its shape is very much open to exploration. It does not have to consist of a new, organizational echelon. Another approach to defining the operational level, especially apt in today's Information Age and presented to foster discussion, is to define it as the narrative that links strategic level achievement of will with tactical level actions.

Phillip Jones retired from the US Army after serving for twenty-two years and is currently working within the research and development domain, where he focuses on requirements of contemporary military operations.

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MANNED, ARMoured, RECONNAISSANCE: WHY AND HOW?



Jim Storr

The British Army will soon receive a new reconnaissance vehicle, the FRES Scout Variant. It will weigh about 30-35 tonnes and have a gun that can penetrate about 140mm of RHA. It will have a top speed of about 70km/h. In 1942 the German Army received a new medium tank, the Panther. As first designed, it weighed about 32 tonnes and its gun could penetrate 138mm of RHA. Perhaps unsurprisingly it was soon up-armoured and, as a result, its top speed was only about 44km/h. Is the British Army actually about to receive a new reconnaissance vehicle, or a new medium tank? (As an aside, we can't envisage FRES Scout being up-armoured, can we?)

For decades the British Royal Armoured Corps' doctrine was that its reconnaissance forces should not fight for information. So why has it now procured a massively powerful fighting platform? Is FRES Scout a camel (a racehorse designed by a committee), or the result of huge confusion as to how armoured reconnaissance should operate? The purpose of this article is to explore that wider question. To do so, it will examine the history of reconnaissance and make some conceptual observations.

First, though, we shall dismiss one particular crass objection. Land forces need ground reconnaissance. Airborne sensors either won't survive; or can be spoofed; or can't interpret the situation on the ground as a man on the spot can; or can't interact with the scenario as a ground platform can; or some combination of those issues. So, very simply, there is a case for manned ground reconnaissance. It needs to be mechanized for mobility and it needs to be armoured to survive; although how much armour is an important question.

Cavalry

Armoured reconnaissance evolved from horsed cavalry. Cavalry,

however, had two overlapping functions: reconnaissance and fighting. That overlap remains a source of gross confusion to this day. The British Army's experience in the South African War (1899-1902) is illustrative. Although it could (and on occasion did) subsequently charge, it acknowledged that attacks with drawn swords were probably a thing of the past[i]. British cavalry doctrine concentrated on three missions: 'strategical' reconnaissance (such as 'where is the German Army?'); tactical reconnaissance (where is the enemy immediately to our front, flanks and (occasionally) rear?) and countering enemy reconnaissance. In 1914 it proved itself to be quite good at all three; particularly the first (in conjunction with the Royal Flying Corps (RFC)) and the last (it effectively forced several divisions of German cavalry to lose the whole of the British Expeditionary Force as it retreated from Mons). However, unreinforced, British cavalry had little, if any, role in defeating enemy probing attacks by advanced main-force elements. Infantry detachments reinforced with artillery and machineguns were used for that.

German experience in the First World War was broadly similar. After the War the German Army analysed its lessons thoroughly and critically. The way it handled its reconnaissance in the Second World War is highly instructive. That is considered below.

It can be argued that the US Army's cavalry had a longer and stronger tradition of fighting from the late 19th Century. It rarely involved charging with drawn swords, but acted as a manoeuvre arm with considerable operational mobility in the Indian Wars on the Great Plains.

The Second World War

Although German armoured reconnaissance units changed and developed through the Second World War, they displayed several consistent features. Each divisional reconnaissance battalion typically contained:

- One, and only one, armoured reconnaissance company;

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equipped either with long-range, eight-wheeled armoured cars or with light tanks.

- One *platoon* of 'domestic' reconnaissance, to provide information for the reconnaissance battalion commander.
- One or two companies of dismounted scouts, trained to fight as infantry and equipped with very small half-tracked APCs; and
- A support company, typically with a mortar platoon, a pioneer (sapper) platoon and an antitank platoon.

The core of the battalion was dismounted scouts in very small APCs. Some battalions replaced one of the companies with what was effectively a surveillance company, which was equipped with specialist observation post vehicles escorted by armoured cars. Critically, very few vehicles were equipped with anything heavier than a 20mm cannon. The Germans produced a 50mm version of their 8-wheeled armoured car, but didn't like it and only ever built 100. Their Panzer II light tanks were modified almost beyond recognition, but never had more than a 20mm cannon. They had a few heavy armoured cars with 75mm antitank guns, and a few half-tracks with 75mm infantry guns: typically no more than six per battalion. The Wehrmacht did not fight for information in any recognisable way.

The Wehrmacht almost never used corps or army-level reconnaissance, but their doctrine required divisional reconnaissance to give their commander six hours' planning time to commit the main body. With a division advancing at ten or fifteen km/h, the reconnaissance battalion might operate 60-90 km in front of the main body. German reconnaissance units were not normally tasked with guard force missions. Doctrine called for a quarter to a third of the force to be used as outposts, to protect and conceal the location of the main body. That typically translated as two or three infantry battalions per division. Reconnaissance battalions did sometimes fight in defence, but typically in a sector of the main position.

Western armies had a less well-developed reconnaissance doctrine and, arguably, were generally less successful. In the Western Desert, British 'Honey' light tanks, procured from the US, were used as light armour and were repeatedly mauled. In North-West Europe there were several instances of reconnaissance units finding enemy gaps and weak spots, only for the main body to fail to exploit the opportunity. US units were probably better handled in the advance, but success was often created by nothing more than well-handled scouts in jeeps.

Critically, both the US and British Armies developed heavy armoured cars (and light tanks) armoured with anything up to 76mm guns. They were used to fight; and often to fight German reconnaissance units which were equipped with nothing more than 20mm cannon. Something was wrong. To be fair, US Cavalry Groups (brigade-sized units) spent a lot of their time not scouting, but fighting. That was largely due to the way they were employed at corps level.

Later Developments

Tellingly, the first post-war German (Bundeswehr) armoured reconnaissance units looked like replicas of their wartime Wehrmacht predecessors. The first truly indigenous Bundeswehr reconnaissance vehicle was an 8-wheeled armoured car with a 20mm cannon! As the Cold War progressed, divisional armoured reconnaissance units took on more and more of a guard force role along the Inner German

Border. MBTs were introduced, and the proportion of armoured cars shrank. After the end of the Cold War the Bundeswehr procured what is, essentially, a highly sophisticated armoured jeep.

In the US Army, corps-level Cavalry Regiments gave up their light tanks for M48, M60 and finally M1 MBTs. M114 scout vehicles were replaced by M113 APCs and then M3 scout versions of the Bradley IFV. In other words, corps and divisional armoured cavalry forces got heavier to reflect their fighting role.

Britain initially adopted a mixture of very light scout vehicles and heavy armoured cars, and then the CVR(T) 'Scimitar' series of tracked armoured reconnaissance vehicles. Although incredibly small and very fast, they were generally heavily armed: with high-velocity Rarden cannon; with 76mm guns; or heavy ATGWs. Although the British Army professed to not fight for information, its reconnaissance units were equipped to fight, and largely given a guard force role on the Inner German Border. Its doctrine was confused.

At the same time the French Army developed a series of light and medium armoured vehicles which were, and still are, ideally suited to low-intensity operations operating over great distances; for example, in sub-Saharan Africa. It was a French armoured car company which overran Timbuktu airport in Mali in January 2013.

Conceptual Aspects

The British FRES Scout will apparently be able to handle terabytes of information, but tactical information is of itself valueless. It only has any value if it allows the possessor to do something.

Operational research demonstrates very clearly that the most effective thing a commander can do on the modern battlefield is to create and exploit surprise. Once that simple fact is recognised much of the logic of reconnaissance drops into place. For example, if you fight for information, you may well gain information; but you have *automatically* lost the ability to create surprise. If, however, you reconnoitre by stealth the enemy does not know what you know. He may well not know where you are, let alone your intentions. Reconnoitring by stealth supports the creation and exploitation of surprise, and tends to preserve the reconnaissance force. Conversely, fighting for information risks attrition to the reconnaissance force and, by definition, destroys any opportunity to create surprise.

Land forces need to protect against surprise, and against the other effects of enemy reconnaissance. That creates a need for guard forces, and they will need to fight: against either the enemy's reconnaissance forces, or advanced main-force detachments. Main force detachments will probably include MBTs. Pitting light and medium AFVs against MBTs forming part of all-arms detachments is not a good idea.

Conversely, however, it may be necessary to penetrate enemy guard forces in order to gain information. *This role is difficult*. The Wehrmacht identified it before the Second World War. It is *not* fighting for information. It is doing *just enough* fighting to allow information to be gained by stealth. Wehrmacht doctrine explicitly advocated using tanks with reconnaissance forces (they already contained infantry and some support weapons) for that purpose.

There will be occasions when highly mobile forces can be used for coup de main operations. The Wehrmacht's experience was that they were extremely rare. Their existing armoured reconnaissance battalions, augmented by tanks if necessary, could generally fit the



bill.

The Third Dimension

Air (and space) craft can clearly play a part. They have done ever since the RFC found the German First Army in August 1914; if not before. Satellite reconnaissance is hugely important and increasingly timely. Unmanned air vehicles have played a huge role in recent conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan. However, up to now, their use has been uncontested. Western armed forces have become entirely unaccustomed to operating without control of the air. How easy it is to shoot down, or otherwise deny the use of, UAVS is currently a great and important unknown.

Nobody would deny that aerial reconnaissance, in several forms, does (and will continue to) play an important part in reconnaissance. It can gain information. But it cannot counter enemy reconnaissance directly. It has difficulty in fighting to allow information to be gained by stealth. Satellite transits have long been predictable, reducing their usefulness in gaining information (they can be spoofed, or avoided, to some extent.)

All this suggests that aerial reconnaissance is, should be, and probably will long remain an important part of the force mix. It may *reduce* the overall need for manned ground reconnaissance. But it would be a foolish army which abolishes manned ground reconnaissance entirely.

Summary and Conclusions

The broad purpose of this article is not to be rude about FRES Scout. It was to clarify thinking about manned ground reconnaissance, because much woolly thought seems to persist. A short article like this cannot 'prove' anything. It can, at best, give strong pointers as to where best practice lies. The main deductions are something like this:

- a. There is, should be, and probably will be a good case for manned, armoured ground reconnaissance for the foreseeable future.

b. It is perfectly reasonable for so-called 'armoured reconnaissance units' to include elements which are equipped and trained to fight. But some elements should be trained and equipped to gain information by stealth: i.e., scouts. They will be different people, and the two roles should not be confused.

c. Do not fight for information. Gain information by stealth. The main reason for doing that is to create the conditions for surprise, and allow that to be exploited. It would be very hard to overemphasize the importance of that. Surprise is a battle, and sometimes a campaign, winner.

d. Gaining information by stealth also helps preserve scarce and valuable scouts.

e. If you give scout vehicles heavy weapons, they will be used.

f. There will be a need for guard forces; not least to prevent being surprised. But do not put light and medium AFVs in guard forces when MBTs are expected.

g. There is a place for light and medium armoured fighting vehicles, especially wheeled vehicles with very high operational mobility. They should keep well away from MBTs.

h. Tactical doctrine should be very clear about who should provide guard forces and advanced guards. They should generally be all-arms groupings drawn from the combat arms, or specially-designed armoured cavalry forces with integral infantry and armour. They should not be mis-employed scouts.

The best scouts are therefore either very small, stealthy AFVs; or infantry patrols, probably transported on very small APCs. The worst of all worlds are light or medium AFVs with heavy weapons. Whatever their tactical doctrine, those weapons *will* be used. There will then be little or no chance of creating surprise. Furthermore, those vehicles will lose out badly against MBTs or well-handled dismounted infantry. Scouts survive best by being stealthy and not taking chances.

FRES Scout? A very capable vehicle. But the worst of all worlds, reflecting entirely confused concepts and therefore a good way of getting brave and well-intentioned young men killed for little benefit.

Jim Storr is Editor of Military Operations.

PS. After having this article reviewed I came across the 1948 Royal Armoured Corps publication 'Volume 1 – Tactics – Pamphlet no. 2 – The Armoured Car Regiment.' This (1948) edition incorporated the hard-earned lessons of the Second World War. Under Section 7, 'Reconnaissance', is the following:

- '1. **Object.**-To be entirely successful, any reconnaissance must obtain the maximum amount of detailed information about the enemy *without his knowledge*, and then report this information accurately to higher formation with the minimum delay'.

(Stress in italics added). They knew. We have either forgotten, or think we know better.

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[i] As an aside: in the 1900s cavalry could potentially charge at three things: infantry, artillery and cavalry. At Waterloo in 1815 the best cavalry in Europe had come unstuck charging infantry equipped only with muskets. As recently as 1898 the British 21st Lancers had come badly unstuck charging spear-wielding irregular native troops at Omdurman. By 1900, charging infantry equipped with repeating rifles, let alone machineguns, was likely to be a bad idea. At Balaklava in 1854 ('the Charge of the Light Brigade') the British cavalry was badly mauled charging artillery. In 1870 at Mars-la-Tour ('von Bredow's Death Ride') Prussian cavalry showed that it could be done; but that was before the invention of breech-loading quick-firing artillery. Cavalry could still charge cavalry; as a quick way of discouraging enemy reconnaissance in numerous inevitably scrappy skirmishes, it had a place. However, as American armies had repeatedly shown during their Civil War, it was often just as easy to dismount and drive them off with small arms fire. By 1914 wise men saw that opportunities to charge would be very limited.

'THE ENEMY HAS A VOTE' AND OTHER DANGERS IN MILITARY SENSE-MAKING



Ben Zweibelson

'Learning to drop one's tools to gain lightness, agility, and wisdom tends to be forgotten in an era where leaders and followers alike are preoccupied with knowledge management, acquisitions, and acquisitiveness.'^[i]

- Karl Weick

In today's adaptive conflict environments, our military and governmental institutions demand that professionals employ 'critical thinking' to make precise, heedful decisions that correspond to effective actions. Yet critical thinking requires a strong element of organizational introspection. We not only should consider the individuals that comprise our current organization, but also the conceptual processes and institutional constructs that function invisibly around us. We rarely question these things for two important reasons. First, we tend not to notice them. When we do, it seems questioning them often comes with unwelcome consequences, as we end up addressing issues beyond individual or group actions. Bringing some of the ineffective, irrelevant, or even harmful institutionalisms regularly employed by the organization to light is often dangerous work.

We are not about to embark on a journey of splitting tactical hairs such as what flavor of counterinsurgency theory works best, or whether one form of maneuver is 'better' than another. These are methodological (the principles and rules of *how* to do something) arguments that relate to tools. Whereas at an epistemological (*how* we know how to do something) level, we stop talking about tools. Instead, we start considering the social constructs that decide what tools we can use, and how we go about employing them.

The word 'epistemological' is an uncommon term, but essential for conveying how one might 'pop out of' thinking about the tools we employ. It helps us contemplate the abstract notions of some of the methodological 'baggage' that shape how we do things.^[ii] Tools are a useful metaphor, with the opening quote to this article from Karl Weick's organizational study of disastrous situations such as forest fires. Weick studied the epistemological reasons on why firefighters died with their tools in their hands instead of dropping them to survive. Weick wrote of methodologies symbolizing 'tools' while he took aim at deeper organizational issues. For us, reflective consideration of military epistemological forces will help us scratch away the surface and get to the deeper phenomenon at play. One way to help distinguish between a series of questions that aim towards epistemology rather than methodology is the employment of 'why' versus 'what' in a series of questions.

To expand on this idea, an infantry unit might use a series of navigational tools and methodologies to get to a new location. At the epistemological level, western militaries use the science of mathematics (including Earth's magnetic field for a compass) as well as literacy and cardinal directions. They will not use divining rods, animal spirits, or Native American tracking techniques to navigate. This distinction is not about the tools, but about *how we know to do navigation, and how we do not.*^[iii] Here are some observations on how the military as an institution tends to make sense of conflict environments at an epistemological level in potentially dangerous or unhelpful ways.

The Enemy has a Vote

It seems we utter the phrase 'the enemy has a vote' at most every intelligence update, planning session, and post-operation review. What does that phrase mean, and why do we employ it? You might not even give it a second thought, but this is how epistemological processes function in our organizations - in plain sight and

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unnoticed. It is usually associated with what military strategist Carl Von Clausewitz described as the 'fog and friction' in warfare, or the element of surprise that a thinking enemy presents.[iv] It is a euphemism for 'our prediction for action may be flawed...it is always possible that the enemy might do something we have not considered.'

It might also mean, 'If the enemy happens to do something I did not mention in detail, I would like to cover that risk with this platitude. Therefore, I have essentially predicted all possible outcomes including those I do not know right now.' Metaphorically, 'the enemy has a vote' states the obvious, while masking deeper institutionalisms at work. Ultimately, it is a defense mechanism of sorts, but it operates to actually inhibit critical thinking. Let us take an epistemological focus on why we say this term, and focus inward.

The phrase provides a retroactive form of protection for prediction, set to defend the very processes that might be entirely wrong in how we sense-make what the enemy might do. Yet when 'the enemy votes' and does act in a manner that disrupts, neutralizes, or even defeats our careful predictions into the future state of the conflict environment, we tend to look at the tools, or the firefighter in question. We reflect only upon our methodologies or individual performance, and not the epistemological aspects of what we did (or failed to do). While commander or staff officer might have made a bad decision, what about when they performed everything in full accordance with existing doctrine, policy, and sound methodologies? We focus on tools too often, and not enough on *why we use those tools*. Consider the following series of performance-related questions below:

- 'Should we have remained mounted until we further isolated the objective?'
- 'Did we employ our supporting fire positions in the right terrain to support the dismounted elements?'
- 'Did the Commander on the ground make the right call to clear the first building instead of the second larger building?'
- 'Should our mission have stated that we were neutralizing instead of destroying?'
- 'Did we identify the right decision point?'
- 'The enemy occupied different buildings, so how could we have better maneuvered our forces to prevent effective suppressive fire?'
- 'Our intelligence was fixated on the insurgent network, but it turned out that the criminal network was far more dangerous to our mission.'

These are all either methodological or individual/unit performance criticisms, and by no means are they not useful. However, unprovable phrases such as 'the enemy gets a vote' become preemptive strikes to halt any epistemological query toward how the organization constructs decision-making. We defend the process by excusing errors as anything but the result of performers - not our decision-making system itself. Here are a few generic examples of critical epistemological questions one might employ if we dismiss the notion that 'the enemy has a vote':

- 'Did our military decision-making process help us make sense

of the situation so that we might anticipate what the enemy eventually did?'

- 'Did our planning process solve the wrong problem right, but miss the right problem entirely? If so - why?'
- 'Did we dismiss any observations or considerations prior to our actions because they did not 'fit' within our preconceived structure of how the world works?'
- 'Are any of our societal or institutional values driving us to a flawed perspective on anticipating, acting, and reflecting on incidents?'
- 'Are we comfortable with finding fault with individuals because faulting the overarching institution is harder to fix? We can fire or retrain individuals because it is within our power; changing the organization is often not.'

The aforementioned epistemological queries do not change the element of change (fog and friction) in military conflicts. Rather, it helps transform how we as an organization sense-make and reflect upon our actions. Imagine a woodworker that had never seen a screw before, was successful with hammering nails, and now is facing unanticipated failure where he encounters screws for the first time. The carpenter might glance at you and utter, 'well, those nails do have a vote' after failed attempts to drive them into the wood.

Observe how the phrase drives us towards methodological reflection on how the operator might have hammered wrong. Instead of merely scolding the carpenter for hammering away at screws with proper form and technique, we might instead question why we are not dropping our preferred tools. This frees us to make sense of whether we require a new tool or technique. Of course, relating nails to complex military environments is an incomplete metaphor, but epistemological reflection is never easy.

Military Euphemisms and Why We Use Them

In the previous example, I explored the euphemism of 'the enemy has a vote.' There are plenty others, but I selected 'the enemy has a vote' for how innocuous it seems in military conversations during our decision-making. Euphemisms exist because our societal, institutional, or group constructs drive our behaviors and discourse to avoid saying certain unpleasant things. Again, because there are epistemological elements at work here, we often do this without even considering them. We say things without thinking about them, yet many words generate meanings with deeper contexts than what they seem on the surface. We call nursing homes 'assisted living centers', vomit into 'air sickness bags', execute criminals with a 'lethal injection'. We use friendly terms such as 'special education', 'visit the powder room', or say 'grandpa is not with us anymore' to avoid unpleasant terms for the same concepts.

Euphemisms are useful within the elegance of human language, but become harmful for organizational development when we lose track of *why* we employ them in the first place. Karl Weick offers the notion that such actions 'deaden imagination' when we begin to name things and lose track of why we named them.[v] Often, the labels fail to help us make sense of new situations. Euphemisms become downright dangerous when we not only ignore them entirely, but also lose an understanding of how we solve the wrong problems because of our misdirection.



Military society has many euphemisms that traverse units, location and the unique value-based aspects of how an organization defines itself. We say 'collateral damage' instead of 'civilians killed by our actions.' We say 'Afghan-right' instead of 'this society maintains different values compared to ours.' We say 'eliminate the target' because it justifies our actions within the context. While I take no issue with any of these euphemisms and routinely use them myself, we need to engage in epistemological reflection on *why we say what we say*. Words matter; why we say something can often reveal the institutional forces at work below the surface.[vi] ISAF Headquarters Public Affairs Office from Kabul, Afghanistan

In planning environments, a frequent euphemism is 'stay in your lane.' Taken directly, it means 'that is my job, not yours...so do your job.'[vii] As epistemological queries operate with 'why' structured questioning rather than 'what' centric thinking, we might ask *why* there are lanes in the first place. The Napoleonic Staff (later the Prussian Staff) first inspired senior military leaders to compartmentalize military sense making into specialty staff components. Prior to this major development in military decision-making, militaries functioned ad hoc. The commander (often a noble or high class leader) tackled many of the aspects of intelligence, maneuver, and logistics himself. Or, the noble parceled it out to chosen and trusted individuals in an unscripted and unregimented manner. Once staffs became specialized, the notion of 'my lane, your lane' developed. Much of our own professional identities become nested within these constructs. Why does this matter? Epistemologically, when a military confronts a complex and adaptive problem, our tendency to break it up into smaller, manageable parts comes at a cost.[viii]

When one is sense making and simultaneously instructed to 'stay in one's lane', they are subsequently confined to appreciating only one part of a problem. This prevents considering things holistically (the big picture) because doing so violates the 'stay in your lane' euphemism.[ix] Here, the euphemism functions undetected because at an epistemological level, the military institution is directing *how* to make sense of a situation, and *how not* to make sense. We will break things down and use specialized staffs to analyze things, even if those very things resist reductionism and require holistic appreciation.[x]

To offer another metaphor here, the reductionist staff collects huge piles of bicycle parts. The intelligence officer is the master of handlebars, while the logistician knows only brake pads and calipers. The engineer collects tires, while the medical officer knows everything about wheels. Each section zealously guards their pile, and largely ignores what is in someone else's section. No one will ever assemble the bicycle, as each specialist is epistemologically discouraged from making sense of the entire (holistic) picture. This group not only cannot assemble bicycles, but also do poorly when they encounter a handlebar/brake/seat combination that defies the neat categories.[xi] Consider the following introspective questions for an organization facing a new, different challenge that defies categorization:

- 'Do we look at the big, messy problem as something we want to break down?'
- 'Does our desire to categorize and reduce help us understand, or does it potentially lead us away from what is really happening?'
- 'Why are we defensive about who explores what, when we face new and uncertain situations that might defy the entire notion of someone's lane?'

- 'Specializing in our own lanes makes great experts in narrow lanes...but are we any good at blending together lots of narrow lanes into a useful highway?'
- 'Could our past successes with different problems lead us down the wrong road for trying to solve a new problem with the wrong methods?'

Many of our euphemisms prevent us from sense making in ways foreign to what our organization prescribes as *the way to think*. This becomes dangerous when we encounter situations that resist our brand of sense making. The hidden danger of euphemisms is that they purposely obscure the epistemological tensions at work, and we often take them for granted.[xii]

'What My Boss Finds Interesting I Find Fascinating as...'

The military hierarchy represents the centralized decision-making and overarching structure of control for modern militaries. In nearly all forms, information flows up while decisions move down. This is both our greatest strength, and at an epistemological level, perhaps our greatest weakness. Our discipline, ability to follow orders, and the necessity of uniformity and repetitive behaviors provides a military with tremendous flexibility, adaptability, and organizational strength. Yet we often pay this cost in the subtle silencing of critical and creative thinking, particularly when the values of loyalty and elements of nepotism influence our sense making.[xiii] I once had a General Officer take over our organization and he brought all the leadership in for his initial brief. He used the euphemism 'what my boss finds interesting, I find fascinating as [expletive]' to convey the importance of maintaining our military hierarchy in the absence of clear prioritization.

This phrase stuck with me over time because it presents a clear epistemological tension. If my superior (who controls and influences my progression and promotion) thinks about something in a particular way, it is in my best interest to think in a similar fashion. This works effectively when the superior makes sense of a situation and establishes some priorities that will aid in accomplishing objectives that lead towards the organizational goals.

Suppose my boss finds icebergs interesting and we are on a ship in the Northern Atlantic together. Epistemological forces should drive me to search for icebergs with zeal. I may win his favor if I generate iceberg targeting cycles, complete with intricate nodal diagrams and pattern analysis. We might develop piles of documents showing significant iceberg analysis for the subordinate organization to digest and report on.[xiv] However, what happens if I am also interested in lifeboats, our ship is named 'The Titanic', and we have not left dock yet? This becomes tricky because if the centralized decision-making authority is disinterested in discussing lifeboats, we risk becoming a 'black sheep' of sorts, or disregard this notion and move on. Later, when lifeboats do become important, it rarely does any good in a hierarchical organization to tell the boss, 'well I told you so!' Thus, we face a double-edged sword in how to employ critical and creative thinking within the military hierarchy. We risk jeopardizing the mission or organization despite our own institutionalisms protecting defective yet cherished features.[xv]

When the hierarchy sense-makes without tension, most personnel within the pyramid look at the situation and share similar observations, principles, and agreed upon methodologies. We do this with our rigorous procedures, indoctrinated approaches, and shared lexicon. If the boss says that icebergs are the priority, it puts me at a



disadvantage to suggest that lifeboats might also be relevant, if not the paramount concern. We must support our superior's perspectives, so how can one offer critical discourse to help aid sense making in a complex environment? This epistemological tension leads into the next point, where decision-making in the hierarchy may go awry due to the very structure that provides us our dependability and organizational strength.

'Rank beats Rock' and other Unfortunate Games Afoot

The very construct that provides our institution tremendous strength, uniformity, discipline, and loyalty is also a great weakness in stifling critical and creative thinking. Our hierarchy is dependent upon following orders. At an epistemological level, our institution tends to demand that the Commander is both the most intelligent and most experienced in the room. This often becomes dangerous in sense making because complex environments tend to reject wholesale experience and the linear application of 'this worked before, so it should work here.'[xvi] Sometimes, our linear thinking processes and vast experience prevents us from seeing things in relevant yet opposing perspectives.[xvii] For example, when I worked closely with a senior leader that had nearly three decades of being a fighter pilot under his belt, it was difficult to not slide into framing every situation with an aerial engagement mentality - even when that perspective unintentionally drove us entirely the wrong way.

This becomes a destructive cycle for critical and creative thinking when the military hierarchy silences epistemological query due to status. We often use the euphemism of 'rank beats rock [paper, scissors]' to gloss over. One quick way to spot the 'rank beats rock' cycle is to notice a shortfall of 'why-centric' questions in favor of 'what-centric' queries for further guidance or direction. We engage in epistemological discovery through 'why' and organizational introspection, but dare not ask when the answer is 'because I am in charge.' Here are a few decision-making questions that split down the 'why versus what' paradox and may assist leaders in framing whether they are pursuing methodological or epistemological lines of thinking:

- 'What assets are available?'
- 'Why do we approach problems in this preferred manner?'
- 'What do we know about the enemy?'
- 'Why do we see some actors as enemies, yet others as friends?'
- 'What is the first decision point for the Commander?'

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- 'Why do we see a decision here, and how does it transform the environment?'
- 'What is measurable for quantifying mission success?'
- 'Why do we seek to rapidly quantify action, and how might our constructs prevent us from exploring deeper issues?'

Conclusions: Bad Habits Die Hard

Our military hierarchy remains a solid institution where discipline, order, and reliability under stress are our greatest strengths. Many of our institutionalisms and methodologies function well. However, leaders at all levels might benefit from recognizing the differences between methodologies and epistemological queries. More importantly, our tendency to promote reflection of the former over the latter is of concern.

Our institutionalisms guide human behaviors in many subtle ways, from the words and phrases we use, to the social constructs we reinforce collectively in our actions and sense making. In our choice of euphemisms and our employment of our own hierarchical balancing act of power and decision-making, many of our potentially dangerous habits function in plain sight. This defines epistemological inquiry, in that we hardly recognize *why we do the things we do* and *how we know this is*.

Many today employ 'buzz' terms such as 'critical thinking' and 'creative thinking' around organizations in practice, yet we tend to confuse these terms with our competing notions of loyalty, structure, discipline, and teamwork. The reflective practitioner might get the Titanic's Captain to prioritize lifeboat constructs into his iceberg plan, if she epistemologically frames the situation holistically. She includes her organizational predilections and behaviors, and artfully acknowledges the hazards of being the creative critic.

That sounds a bit too easy, particularly because Monday morning quarterbacks have all the solutions for what should have been done after the battle is over. Yet too many professionals get wrapped around methodologies where arguing over what technique or tool should be employed ends up blinding the organization to deeper epistemological questions. When these core questions help illuminate unhealthy organizational decision-making as it occurs, the reflective practitioner helps pull back the curtains and reveals how pointless a discussion on tools is when the major problem has to do with our own behaviors, values, and social constructs.



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THINKING FAST AND SLOW FOR SOLDIERS



John Wilson

(Based on Daniel Kahneman's Book – Allen Lane, 2011)

Daniel Kahneman's book, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, is a best seller, and deservedly so; although I wonder how many buyers have read it from beginning to end. It is very well written and mixes abstract with concrete using many examples to make the point. But I won't pretend to have fully understood it or to have deduced as much from it as I should have done. After all, Daniel Kahneman is a Nobel Prize winning economist and a distinguished psychologist, and I am not. There is enough for me to show that this is a work that some soldiers should make the effort to read and apply.

Kahneman aims the book at the gossip by the office water-cooler, or in the British Army the idle chat at coffee break – a vital feature of military life and sadly neglected by the ignorant and the managerial. He wants to "enrich the vocabulary that people use when they talk about the judgments and choices of others, the company's new policies, or a colleague's investment decisions". "...It is much easier, as well as far more enjoyable, to identify the mistakes of others than to recognize our own." The book is in five parts:

Part 1 – presents the basic elements of a two systems approach to judgment and choice.

Part 2 – updates the study of judgment heuristics.

Part 3 – describes the difficulties of statistical thinking.

Part 4 – is a conversation with the discipline of economics on the nature of decision-making and on the assumption that economic agents are rational.

Part 5 – describes a distinction between two selves – the remembering self and the experiencing self, which do not have the same interests.

From this remarkable book I will draw some observations that seem to me to be helpful for soldiers: soldiers as tacticians, as leaders, as trainers, as organizers and administrators, and as project managers.

At the centre of his work is the idea of Systems 1 and 2. System 1 operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control. System 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations. The operations of System 2 are often associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice and concentration. Kahneman stresses that these two systems do not really exist in the brain or anywhere else. System 1 is a shortcut for "X occurs automatically". And "System 2 is mobilized to do Y" is a shortcut for "arousal increases, pupils dilate, attention is focused, and Y is performed". When you drive on the motorway and you steer a gentle curve – you use System 1, you can continue a conversation or listen to the radio at the same time. When you negotiate Hangar Lane on the A4 in West London, you invoke System 2: you concentrate, you calculate, the radio may still be on but you are not hearing it, you stop talking.

The Appreciation or Estimate

Dorman-Smith's appreciation for Auchinleck's Alamein battle was the product of System 2: clear and analytical. Macarthur's decision to land at Inchon started with System 1. A soldier taught the combat estimate is told to invoke System 2; in practice the experienced junior leader will use mostly System 1. And he can see the tactical solution because he recognizes it.

Kahneman worked with Gary Klein to investigate how fireground commanders could make good decisions without comparing options – which we call "Courses Open". "The initial hypothesis was that commanders would restrict their analysis to only a pair of options..."

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in fact, the commanders generated only a single option, and that was all they needed. They could draw on the repertoire of patterns that they had compiled during more than a decade of real and virtual experience to identify a plausible option, which they considered first. They evaluated this option by mentally simulating it to see if it would work in the situation they were facing... If the course of action they were considering seemed appropriate they would implement it. If it had shortcomings they would modify it. If they could not easily modify it, they would turn to the next most plausible option and run through the same procedure until an acceptable course of action was found".

Klein called this recognition-primed decision. In case you are wondering, the fireground commanders' approach was sound. And it makes sense if I quote Herbert Simon's definition of intuition: *"The situation has provided a cue; this cue has given the expert access to information stored in the memory, and the information provides the answer. Intuition is nothing more and nothing less than recognition"*.

To get to this level is a skill, it takes time and application. It is not a single skill but the acquisition of many mini-skills. And for these intuitive skills to be valid there are two basic conditions:

- An environment that is sufficiently regular to be predictable.
- An opportunity to learn these regularities through prolonged practice.

The obvious objection to the use of intuition in the tactical battle is the unpredictability of the environment. Yet recognition still plays a huge part. Commanders develop a feel, they see patterns, they become aware of the dogs that don't bark, and they know well their own forces and may know well the ground. They also know what they can and cannot do – especially the latter. The challenge for armies is to develop their commanders through regular practice.

At Goose Green (Falklands War 1982), the commanding officer of 2 PARA did his combat estimate (System 2) and produced a 7-phase plan. His thinking was in line with current British Army practice. However, at least one of his more experienced company commanders would probably have opted for the simple battle plan – *an advance to contact with one company up* – with a high element of System 1. The battalion won its battle because of the quality of its fighting men and despite the plan. British Army commanding officers do not undergo the type of preparation that submarine commanders do – where swift and accurate execution is demanded and where failure on test is punished. As an army we under-estimate the value of repetition and practice. We regularly declaim that training is the opportunity to make mistakes and learn; sadly we are unable to consistently distinguish between practice and testing.

I know the traditional idea is that after a spell at unit level officers alternate between staff and command tours, but there is still a general approach of learning on the job and absorption of tactical nous by osmosis rather than systematic instruction and practice. Whilst operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have concentrated the mind, they are theatre-focused. There is no sign of regular and demanding practice of tactical exercises at all levels. Yet the finding of those who study intuition is that valid skill only comes from dedicated and systematic practice over time.

Statistics

Kahneman has a neat example of statistical thinking from his time

with the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). He gave a speech to the Israeli Air Force about the importance in skill training that rewarding improvement is superior to punishing mistakes. A seasoned instructor pointed that many times he had praised cadets for a skilful manoeuvre but that the next time they invariably performed more poorly, and that when he had screamed at a trainee for a bad manoeuvre, in general he did better the next time. The instructor's observation was astute but his inference was wrong. What he had observed was a *regression to the mean*. Which in that case was due to random fluctuations in the quality of performance.

Understanding statistics is an essential part of a staff officer's job and without it s/he cannot assess risk let alone provide the data for decision-making. There is much more in Kahneman's book that can be usefully gleaned.

Selection

Intriguingly, Kahneman was part of a group that assessed officer candidates. And the methods the IDF used were those employed by the British Army: of observation on command tasks – obstacles that required a team to solve and execute without nominating a leader. The observation team assiduously recorded their findings, which showed to their satisfaction how well they understood the candidates and their suitability as leaders. Their impressions of how well each soldier had performed were generally coherent and clear, formal predictions were just as definite. They rarely experienced doubts and were willing to declare, "that fellow is mediocre, this one will never make it, that one is a star". Yet they knew with certainty that their predictions were largely useless. The feedback from the officer training school was that their ability to predict performance at the school was negligible. Yet even knowing that when the next batch of candidates arrived, assessment began again, spirits lifted, and again it was clear that their true natures were revealed. Kahneman describes it as the *illusion of validity*.

Now, in case you think we know so much better 50 years later, let me give you some recent figures for entry for Sandhurst: looking at the one hundred officer cadets (O/Cdts) commissioning, those identified as carrying some risk from Army Officer Selection Board (AOSB) into the commissioning course at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst commissioned as follows:

Top third has 7 of the 28 O/Cdts at risk from AOSB.

Middle third has 12 of the 28 O/Cdts at risk from AOSB.

Bottom third has 9 of the 28 O/Cdts at risk from AOSB.

If the AOSB were spot on, then all those at risk would have been in the bottom third at the end of the course. In fact as a group they did better than those judged above them from AOSB as carrying no risk.

Planning and Projects

Kahneman describes a sobering event in his professional life. He persuaded the Israeli ministry of education to allow him to develop a project to write a curriculum for teaching decision-making and judgment in high schools. He created a team and after a year of cogitating they had a detailed outline of the syllabus, written a couple of chapters and trialled some lessons. They thought they were making good progress. He then held a meeting to discuss progress

and assess the task.

He started the meeting in his own recommended way. Which is to ask each person to write down very briefly their position – and then put them on to a board. This he says is how meetings should be conducted, a general opening discussion merely allows some to dominate and other views may never be heard. Sounds like a very sharp idea to me. The estimates for the length of the project centred around 2 years. At the meeting was an expert on curriculum development. Kahneman asked him whether he knew of other teams who had tried to bring in a curriculum on a new subject and how they had fared. The expert, Seymour Fox, said that other teams had taken 7 years and with only a 40% success rate. On further questioning it became clear that Kahneman's team was no better equipped than these others. They were aghast, but carried on as if nothing had happened. The project eventually took 8 years by which time the ministry had lost interest and the text was never used.

Kahneman and his team thought they had a well-developed scheme, and they were wrong. He learned 3 lessons:

- That there are two views of forecasting: inside (the team's) and outside (Seymour Fox's knowledge of similar projects).
- The initial forecast of 2 years was a planning fallacy – it was a best-case scenario rather than a realistic assessment.
- Irrational perseverance – the folly they displayed that day in failing to abandon the project. Facing a choice, they gave up rationality rather than the project.

Other examples include:

- The Scottish Parliament building – estimate in 1997 was £40m, completed in 2004 at a cost of £431m.
- A survey of kitchen improvements by American householders showed that initial estimates averaged \$18,658 with eventual costs averaging \$38,769.
- A study of worldwide rail projects from 1969 to 1998 showed that in over 90% of cases rail passenger increases were over-estimated by an average of 106% with cost over-runs of 45%. Think HS2.
- Any number of UK MOD weapons projects: Nimrod (maritime air), Wavell (failed IT), Astute Submarine class, current build of aircraft carriers, development of F35 (VSTOL) and on and on.

Kahneman's proposal is the need for outside referencing. In other words find similar projects, obtain the statistics and use specific information to match the project to determine a realistic assessment. Fairly obvious you might think, but try explaining why it does not happen. Kahneman suggests that people have a delusional optimism rather than a rational weighting of gains, losses and probabilities. It probably helps to explain why people litigate, start wars and open small businesses – he says.

Risk and Body Armour

Kahneman uses an example of protecting a child to demonstrate enhanced loss aversion. Parents were told to imagine that they used an insecticide where the risk of inhalation and child poisoning was

15 per 10,000 bottles. A less expensive insecticide was available, for which the risk rose from 15 to 16 per 10,000 bottles. The parents were asked for the discount that would induce them to switch to the less expensive (and less safe) product. More than two thirds of the parents responded that they would not purchase the product at any price. They were revolted by the idea of trading money for the safety of their child. Those that would accept a discount demanded a far higher amount than they would be prepared to pay for a far higher improvement in the safety of the product.

He points out the incoherence of this approach, that we all have finite amounts of money. Money that could be saved by accepting a minute increase in risk from a pesticide could be put to much better use in reducing the child's exposure to other harms – buying a safer car seat or covers for electrical sockets.

Now think about our approach to body armour. Where is the rational debate between mobility and protection? We already have ballistic underpants and we know that the weight carried by a soldier in Helmand province is about 50kg. We know that the immobility results in soldiers carrying more ammunition to compensate for their static nature. More ammunition, more weight, less mobility. The only relief from this remorseless cycle comes from limiting the duration and nature of the patrols. But armies and their governments are so loss averse that they cannot contemplate reducing body armour, else some soldier is struck in the now undefended part of his body.

And yet we continue to teach fire and manoeuvre as if it can still be done. We don't do it in Helmand so why would we imagine that we would do it in the traditional way in another conflict? Soldiers are not tanks. Technology allowed us to develop tanks that would be mobile, agile, well protected and carry great firepower. The power plant enabled us to get tanks to where they are now, but physiology will not allow us to take men down the same route.

The dilemma is resolvable by rational analysis. We can acquire the data to show the tactical penalty to carrying the weight we do. We can take that further by showing the change in casualty rates – the cost and benefits of using body armour and using less or none. We should be able to show when more body armour makes sense – for sentries, gun and mortar positions for example as Diem Bien Phu showed. We should be able to argue rationally that ceding the initiative to the enemy allowed him to seed the ground with IEDs. It may be that this research has been done, but I doubt it. Because the aversion to loss is so strong that we would now be moving from a default position and Daniel Kahneman has much to say about how you view losses and gains.

Why Will So Little of This Count?

Even Daniel Kahneman can only drill down so far. His approach seems entirely rational to me. I can think of many examples from my own time ranging from fruitless discussions on IFF/Combat ID to benefits of continuity in command to staggering unit roulements – where the clearly rational sensible approach was ignored. Other agendas were at work. Some fell into the category of throwing good money after bad – failing to quit a doomed project early. Others were of the loss aversion type – an unwillingness to develop, articulate and discuss tricky issues. Some were the overly optimistic - let's go to Helmand and hope no shots are fired, or they will just love us - no need to plan.

But for the thinking (slow or fast) soldier Daniel Kahneman has provided a war chest of good thoughts. It is not a book for all, and



it certainly cannot be applied glibly. He talks about the 'the nudge approach' and this is the best the concerned soldier can hope for. To nudge the command and staff by demanding a rational approach. At least extract some admission of the flimsy underlying agenda, force a little shame – show that the irrational or emotional response is just that and do one's best to keep them honest.

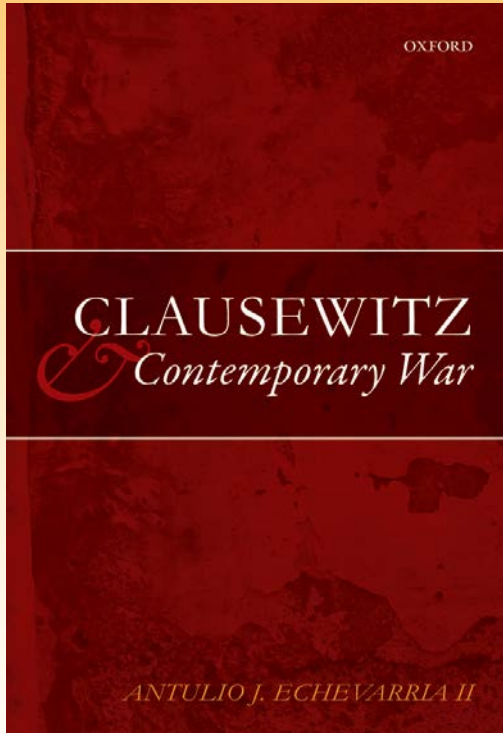
He has one observation that you can try at home: marital stability is well predicted by a formula:

Frequency of lovemaking minus frequency of quarrels.

You don't want the result to be a negative number.

John Wilson is a member of Military Operations' Editorial Advisory Panel

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MASTERCLASSES

Jim Storr

The ethos of Military Operations is about developing an understanding of how land forces do, can and should fight. That applies, in a broader sense, to Infinity Journal and the IJ Group as a whole. 'Developing an understanding' can, in part, be undertaken by publishing peer-reviewed journals; but that is (and should be) only part of the picture.

When setting up Military Operations, we always had in mind that many people with an interest or involvement in defence matters probably didn't understand the mechanics of warfare as well as they would wish. That's not surprising. Warfare is an extensive, complex and difficult subject. Armed forces focus primarily on *training* their people on 'how to do it'. To some extent, officer academies and staff colleges also *educate* their officers more broadly; but there is always a tension between the pressing need to train and the need to educate. There is also a tension between the need to develop an understanding of the national approach to warfare and how other nations consider (or have considered) the subject. And a great many other people involved in warfare haven't been to officer academies or staff colleges.

Those people may not have such depth of knowledge, but they can bring other things to the debate. Writers or journalists may have experienced, seen or read things that others haven't. Academics and students can bring a fresh and enquiring mind, perception and intellectual rigour that others may not. Scientists, engineers and analysts can bring a technical and practical knowledge of how things actually work that others don't have.

All those things prompted us to develop face-to-face opportunities to develop understanding. Our first event was held in Cambridge, England in July 2014. It was a huge success. We were careful to capture feedback from those who attended. We asked them to score 17 different aspects, on a score of 1 ('extremely poor') to 7 ('excellent'). Over 70% of those who responded graded the event '6' or '7' overall! That told us that we were doing most things fairly well, but also that some areas needed further work. That gave us the confidence to develop the programme for the present year and, we hope, subsequent years.

Our attendees came from a very wide variety of backgrounds. There were serving officers. There were university academics and postgraduate students. There were individuals from industry and from the media. There were defence civil servants. People came from Brazil, Canada, the United States, Germany and several other countries. We had interest from southern and eastern Europe, South Africa and the Caribbean. The event was significantly over-subscribed.

The venue was a huge 'plus'; we were most fortunate to be able to use the facilities of St John's College, Cambridge. It is hard to envisage a more atmospheric setting for such an intellectual undertaking. It would also be hard to find a more historic setting: St John's was founded, as an educational institution, in 1511.

We did find, however, that the content of our Masterclass was received in two different ways. Most attendees seemed to find that the knowledge and information which we imparted was hugely valuable, and were content with that. A few, however, wanted to explore how that understanding might work in practice. How do you plan and conduct a major operation? How does a live, responsive, capable enemy affect not just a plan, but the outcome of an operation? What can a commander do to overcome that? Are nations' tactical doctrines as good as they could be, or should they explore alternative approaches?

Clearly the only way to fully examine those issues would be to conduct a real war. That's one reason why warfare is such a demanding topic. However, we know that we can explore those issues to some extent; because that is just what armed forces do. It is one of the reasons why they conduct wargames. So, our new departure for 2014 is to offer a wargame-based event. We call it the Seminar Wargame and, this year, it will be held at Cambridge from 15th to 17th August.

We are deliberately proceeding slowly. We want each event to be successful, so we want to put a lot of care into developing each one. Clearly, having developed an event and captured lessons, it is relatively easy to repeat that event. That is the thinking behind repeating last year's Masterclass as the 'Graduate Warfare Class', at Cambridge from 25 to 27 July this year.

The response so far has been highly positive. Of the first five applicants for places:

- a. One person attended last year's masterclass, and has now applied for this year's seminar wargame. That is highly encouraging.
- b. Two applied last year, but couldn't attend and are keen to come this year (one had to withdraw last year for administrative reasons; the other was on our reserve list and we couldn't offer him a place). That is also highly encouraging.
- c. One is an entirely new applicant. That is also encouraging.
- d. One is an entirely new applicant who wishes to attend both events! That is even more encouraging.

We have to restrict numbers of attendees so that we can create an appropriate learning environment. We want these events to be interactive and participatory, which is not consistent with filling a lecture hall with hundreds of people. We would rather run more events, at a variety of venues, so that we can involve more people over the long term. We are also looking to extend participation to undergraduate students. That, however, will require some refocusing of what we offer; when; where; and how.

For the future, we want to continue to expand slowly. We intend to offer the same events each year, but also:

- a. To develop new opportunities. We will do that, but we need to give each idea plenty of thought and then commit development effort to ensuring a successful event.
- b. To take our events to other venues. We'd like to consider offering those events in North America; in the Asia-Pacific region; in the Caribbean or South America. We'd happily consider other locations, and happily collaborate with other organisations to deliver those events.

We are extremely happy with, and a little proud of, what we have achieved so far. We hope that you will see more of it in future. In fact, we hope to see you at one or more of our events in future.

