



# Military Commanders and Risk

An Airman's Perspective

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# Thoughts on this Seminar

- One military officer's viewpoint
  - Career of doing and learning
  - Offer support through great leaders' observations
- Can't possibly cover subject in forty-five minutes
  - Not a course in warfare or military leadership
  - Military service schools teach over course of a year
  - Professional officers learn over course of a lifetime
- Brief glimpses of how risk has been mitigated
- Willing to stray - open forum

# Overview

- Military officers, professionalism and war
- Motivations, strategic guidance, tactical action
- Mitigating risk before and during the conflict
- Brief thoughts on 21st century warfare
- Summary

# War and Professional Military Officers

- Duties of Professional Military Officer
  - Organize, train and equip the force
  - Direct the force in and out of combat
- Professional military officers hate war
  - Nasty, savage, ruthless, unbounded pain
  - Wasteful of youngest, most capable people, society's cream
- Military officers have ultimate liability clause
  - In business of the application of violence
  - Must be a student yet be at the top of his vocation

# Leader's Thoughts on War

- “I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its stupidity.”  
Dwight E. Eisenhower, Speech in Ottawa, Canada  
(January, 10 1946)
- “Every decision that puts a young person in harm's way is a hard decision for someone who loves his country.” General Tommy Franks

# Why Accept the Risk - What is the Motivation

- Churchill, June 18, 1940, rolled the dice on civilization
  - Battle of Britain; “upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life...if we fail then the whole world, including the United States, and all we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss...”
- Defend the homeland, way of life, values, beliefs
- “The good will outweigh the loss of lives and other costs that will surely ensue.” Colin Powell

# Paying the Price for Strategic Goal

- The Japanese island of Iwo Jima lay midway between American bomber bases in the Marianas and Japan
- Iwo Jima was needed for two reasons
  - Base for fighter escorts
  - Emergency landing strip for crippled bombers
- Strategic goal outweighed projected losses
  - 110,000 Marines against 20,000 plus Japanese
  - Over 25,000 US casualties; 6,825 dead
  - Virtually all Japanese dead
- Results
  - Iwo Jima captured for fighter bases
  - 2,400 bombers w/27,000 men made emergency landings

# Understanding the Business

- War has a life and dynamic of its own
  - There is zero chance that it will go the way you think
  - Must be terminated on our terms
- War is an interactive game
  - The enemy has a chance to make a decision and effect the outcome - can't let than happen
- You don't know what you don't know
  - Can't have all the answers
  - Have to act on less than 100% information

# Conducting the Business of War

- Execution - Sun Tzu Style
  - Aggressive, fast, savage - unravel the enemy
  - Strength against weakness
  - Disorient and confuse the enemy
  - Don't degenerate to attrition warfare
- The OODA Loop - Colonel John Boyd
  - Observe, Orient, Decide, Act
  - Do this faster - Get inside the mind and decision cycle of the adversary - "Get inside the adversary's OODA Loop."

# Strategy to Tactics

- National Command Authority Decision and Orders
  - Strategic guidance
  - Clearly stated policy goal or objective
- Operational (Combatant) Commander's Intent
  - Develop military strategy that contributes to strategic goal
  - Guidance to tactical forces linking actions to strategic goals
  - Enables real time decision making by subordinates
- Tactical Operations
  - The pointed end of the spear...the combatant forces
  - Tactical commanders determine the required actions

# Clear Orders to the Combatant Commander

Prime Minister (Churchill) to General Alexander,  
Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East (10 Aug 42)

1. Your prime and main duty will be to take or destroy at the earliest opportunity the German-Italian Army commanded by Field-Marshal Rommel, together with all its supplies and establishments in Egypt and Libya.
2. You will discharge or cause to be discharged such other duties as pertain to your Command, without prejudice to the task described in paragraph 1, which must be considered paramount in His Majesty's interests.

## ... and the response

General Alexander to the Prime Minister (Six months later)

Sir:

The orders you gave me on August [10], 1942 have been fulfilled. His Majesty's enemies, together with their impediments, have been completely eliminated from Egypt, Cyrenaica, Libya, and Tripolitania. I now await your further instructions.

# Risk Mitigation in Modern Warfare

- Acceptance of Strategic Risk is dependent on the tip of the spear
- Train as you fight - fight as you train
- Train subordinates to exercise initiative and flexibility
- Plan but beware
  - Plans are worthless, but planning is everything
  - Remember, there is zero chance it will go the way you think

# The Japanese Approach to Pearl Harbor

- Combatant Commander's Intent
  - “In case of war with the United States, Yamamoto plans to attack the U. S. Fleet in Pearl Harbor. The First Air Fleet's mission is to carry out this operation.”
- Thought through each incremental piece of the puzzle
  - Serious study of all problems
  - Took initiative to solve problems
- The best they had - trained them to make them better
  - Handpicked leadership
  - Highly realistic and authentic training for aircrews

# One USAF Approach to Risk Mitigation

- Combat actions based on competencies/experience
  - Need to know what it looks, feels, and smells like
- Red Flag - large force employment training
  - Highly realistic, but controlled, training environment
  - Simulates critical first 10 combat missions
- Not just training, but laboratory
  - Opportunity for free exchange - employment of tactical ideas

# When Might Military Risk Not Be Acceptable

- When commanders have the luxury to decide
  - Not life or death
  - Might be at the highest levels of authority
- When potential costs outweigh the potential gains
  - Commanders use their understanding of the big picture
  - Victory is not assured
- When available information just is not enough
  - Too many unanswered questions

# Japan's Decision Not to Re-attack Pearl

- Surprise achieved
  - Wildly successful
  - Minimal losses confined only to aircraft
- No contingency plan to exploit success
  - Operational success - objectives achieved
  - Thought to be reckless gamble with unclear dividends
- Too many questions - not enough answers
  - Didn't know where US carriers were
  - Unsure of US bomber and submarine situation
- On site commander hesitation
  - Not flexible enough to meet unexpected situations
  - Tradition and thought process of a lifetime didn't allow

# 21st Century Military Commanders and Risk

- Still the profession of arms
  - Leaders of dedicated men and women
  - Lifetime students of the management of violence
- Dedicated to preserve national ideals
  - Defense of country, values, and way of life
- Acceptance and mitigation of risk still the same
  - Organize, train and equip the force
  - Career of doing and learning enables decisions

# Summary

- Acceptance of risk is dependent on the tip of spear
  - Competencies
  - Experience
- Mitigate risk by thorough and realistic training
  - Train as you fight, fight as you train
  - Give people skills, background and flexibility
  - Simulate first few days of combat
- Clear intent and goals facilitate risk management
  - Foster trust, cooperation, simplicity, focus
  - Enables freedom of action to accomplish task

# Discussion