



Strategic And Tactical 'Paper Pushing'

"The pen is mightier than the sword."

—Edward Bulwer-Lytton

The U.S. Army puts such a high premium on command that few commissioned officers who have not previously commanded at company, battalion and brigade levels ever wear stars, whereas most professional staff officers who make superlative performance possible cap careers with eagles on their shoulders if they are lucky. General officers, as a general rule, are consequently grand tacticians and practitioners of operational art

who win battles and campaigns but seldom excel at grand strategy, which wins wars. That sorry state will persist as long as most U.S. Army officers

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yearn for command and scorn "paper pushing."

My eccentric experiences suggest that diversified strategic, operational and tactical staff assignments can enhance U.S. national security by providing commanders with sharp intellectual tools and can also simultaneously improve subsequent prospects for civilian careers.

Strategic Intelligence

My only penance in the Pentagon was between November 1950 and January 1953, as a captain and the Army G-2's Arab-Israeli desk officer, assigned solely because I had earned a graduate degree in geography on the GI Bill. Extensive tutelage was immediately required, since I lacked intelligence experience at any level and knew next to nothing about the Middle East.

Step one was to attend a three-week course at the Strategic Intelligence School on Constitution Avenue near what is now the Vietnam Memorial. That institution has long since disappeared, but I still lean heavily on lessons learned in its classrooms. The value of unclassified materials, for example, became crystal clear when I combed newspapers and periodicals to develop an open-source order of battle for U.S. armed forces and, within a brief period, located all newly installed Nike Ajax surface-to-air missile sites around Washington, D.C., and learned the number of launchers per battery and the names of some battery commanders. Maps drawn to scale showed the best access and escape routes. Intelligence-gathering techniques acquired at that institution helped a lot when members of Congress asked me to prepare unclassified U.S.-Soviet military balance assessments from 1975 until the U.S.S.R. collapsed.

Strategic Intelligence School and subsequent attendance at several of DoD's academic institutions confirmed that progressive education facilitates professional staff work. Many observers viewed my matriculation at two staff colleges and two senior service colleges as overkill, but every course served as a unique building block. Other paper pushers should formally or informally enhance their knowledge bases at every opportunity.

Introductions to the Middle East, for example, were real eye-openers. My civilian supervisor had to tell me that *Mordecai* was a Jewish name. I discovered that U.S. military attachés moved about less freely in Israel, a U.S. ally, than they did in the Soviet Union, an enemy of the United States. The best qualified Arab and Iranian officers often spurned attendance at U.S. military schools because lengthy absences would remove them from *baksheesh* (graft) chains that lined their pockets.

Updating card files that summarized the idiosyncrasies and aspirations of key officials in countries I surveyed consumed considerable time but was worth it because personal histories illuminated pecking orders, probable lines of succession and other politico-military relationships.

I attended a summer seminar that the American University of Beirut (AUB) conducted for the State Department in 1952. Our Navy declined its invitation, but the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps and CIA participated. Arab professors presided over graduate-level courses that covered regional geography, cultures, history, influences of Islam and contemporary problems. All three Army attendees were chauffeured throughout Lebanon, Jordan and a good deal of Syria, which soon was closed to outsiders. The entire class toured Jerusalem, Hebron, Bethlehem and adjacent territo-

ries. The trip to Tel Aviv via Cyprus came last, because no Arab country would honor passports that contained an Israeli visa. Impressions gained during those brief weeks at AUB and as the Army G-2's Arab-Israeli guru not only improved my value as a Middle East analyst in the Pentagon but stimulated interests that remain intense.

Theater Intelligence

The choice at that juncture might have been to specialize in Middle East matters or branch out, but I was posted to the Far East, which put me on the road that read *generalist* rather than *specialist*.

Ensuing assignments developed global rather than regional perspectives, but either path can reward paper pushers with a career that is personally satisfying and simultaneously contributes to U.S. national security.

The staff billet I occupied briefly after the Korean War ended was geographer with a military intelligence group in Japan, preparing town plans primarily along the Trans-Siberian Railroad from Lake Baikal to the Pacific—Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude, Chita, Blagoveshchensk and Khabarovsk remain etched in my mind. Source materials centered on reports that Nisei civilians compiled by interrogating Japanese prisoners recently repatriated from Soviet slave labor camps, but I sometimes wonder how closely our depictions resembled satellite photographs taken many years later. Familiarization with all of Siberia east of the Yenisei River nevertheless paid serendipitous dividends when I began to assess U.S.-Soviet military balances in 1975.

I soon switched to current intelligence with Army Forces Far East, where my mission was to prepare daily intelligence summaries in the dead of night for use every morning by Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor and key members of his staff. That assignment, which lasted through May 1955, focused my attention on politico-military developments throughout eastern Siberia, China, Taiwan, both Koreas and Japan. I functioned as the chief (and only) member of a review unit that established production schedules for then-Brig. Gen. H.J. Vander Heide's Intelligence Division, then critiqued all reports for organization, content and style before publication. Being judge, juror and executioner didn't make me the world's most popular person, but I learned a lot about East Asia across the board.

Operational and Tactical Intelligence

At the operational level, I cut my teeth on Operational Plan (OPLAN) Swaggerstick in 1957 as a member of the G-2 Plans Section, XVIII Airborne Corps. Related efforts conveniently concerned the Middle East, my specialty in the Pentagon several years earlier. It soon became apparent to supervisors and peers alike that I'd found my niche. Then-Maj. Gen. Hamilton H. Howze, the 82nd Airborne Division commander, was the first of several senior generals who began to ask for me by name about that time. Other paper pushers would likewise do well to hitch their wagons to stars and cultivate flag-level patron saints.

Gen. Howze made me his assistant G-2 later that year and

almost immediately thereafter demanded a “professional” briefing map for a major field exercise dubbed *Oil Slick*. Hard-nosed Lt. Col. Chet McCoid, my new boss, said, “Produce a beaut not later than 0600 hours tomorrow morning.” Paul Connolly, the section sergeant, chose a private first class to undertake that task because he was a genius at layer-tinting military maps with different colored chalks to differentiate elevations. Hair spray from the post exchange prevented smears. Reporting time was right after evening chow, but “my” PFC didn’t appear until long after dark. I put him to work without recriminations, then tore huge strips off his backside *after* he colored a map that pleased Gen. Howze completely. When we parted company after midnight, Sgt. Connolly admiringly remarked, “That was the school solution, sir!” I similarly employed layer-tinting techniques to great advantage as chief of Gen. William C. Westmoreland’s campaign planning group in Vietnam one decade later.

Contingency Planning

Traditional progression up any promotion ladder is preferable, but my helter-skelter trips from top to bottom and back up again produced no ill side effects. Other paper pushers similarly should relax and enjoy the ride if their careers don’t develop in straight lines because the erratic sequence of staff assignments rarely is injurious.

Then-Lt. Gen. Westmoreland, Gen. Howze’s successor at XVIII Airborne Corps, sacked the G-3 planner responsible for the mess in Cuba and made me his replacement in September 1963. Reasons for change were obvious because OPLAN 316, as it was called then, required major refinements and updating after the missile crisis subsided. Airstreams that headed from western departure bases toward eastern objective areas crisscrossed over the Florida Strait with flights that flew from east to west. Paratroopers who overshot coastal drop zones west of Havana would have drowned in Mariel Bay, and vegetation akin to Spanish bayonet covered other drop zones.

Responsibility for OPLAN 316 required close and continuous collaboration with Continental Army Command (now Training and Doctrine Command) at Fort Monroe, Va., every XVIII Airborne Corps staff section (especially logisticians) and planners in every subordinate division. (Lou Menetrey, then a captain with the 101st Airborne Division, ended up with four stars in Korea.)

I also maintained close contact with counterparts in Virginia—at Naval Station Norfolk, Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek and Langley Air Force Base—and the 2nd Marine Division at Camp Lejeune, where Capt. P.X. Kelley (later Marine Corps commandant) was my counterpart. Orientation tours at Guantánamo in 1964—coupled with naval brief-

ings at Puerto Rico’s Roosevelt Roads and on Vieques—sharpened appreciation for U.S. footholds in Cuba and Caribbean springboards. OPLAN 316, in short, gave me a grand introduction to joint contingency planning.

Feasibility Studies

Paper pushers shouldn’t despair when “bitter” temporarily supersedes “better” until personnel managers or dumb luck improve their prospects. In September 1967, when I was a brand-new bird colonel, for example, I occupied a dead-end assignment. Gen. Westmoreland, in his capacity as commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, placed me atop a recently activated campaign planning group (CPG) after the first incumbent flopped.

My small, handpicked joint staff included an executive officer plus six Army officers who specialized in intelligence, combined-arms tactics, heliborne operations, engineering, telecommunications and land transportation. Two Air Force officers handled fixed-wing airlift and weather. A sergeant major, plus a few clerks, rounded out the CPG roster, but I had easy entrée to every major Army command in Vietnam, III Marine Amphibious Force, Seventh Air Force, 5th Special Forces Group and the supersensitive Studies and Observation Group.

Responsibilities initially concentrated on feasibility studies to determine whether Gen. Westmoreland’s monsoon plans would work (one for the wet season, one for the dry). The first requirement arrived just before supper time one evening. I said, “No sweat. We’ll wrap it all up in three weeks.” Think again. “Gen. [Bruce] Palmer wants a full dress briefing at 0800 tomorrow morning. No notes allowed. You have to look authoritative.” We worked all night, and at 0800 on the dot I made my bleary-eyed pitch, replete with slides. Three weeks of further investigation merely refined our quick and dirty conclusions. That exhilarating experience taught me a lot about responsive staff work under extreme pressure.

Operational Planning

The campaign planning mission soon changed from feasibility studies to operational planning. OPLAN El Paso, designed to block the Ho Chi Minh Trail for six months during a dry season bracketed by six months of rain, came first. Memorable events included a trip to Bangkok, where I coordinated with Thai armed forces on our open west flank; aerial reconnaissance throughout I Corps tactical zone (especially routes from the coast to Khe Sanh and down the A Shau Valley, where enemy gunners drilled my engineer through one leg); and flights across the Laotian panhandle at levels so low I could see hair on the backs of little elephants working fields. I hallucinated about my name in lights as the architect of operations that successfully severed the Ho Chi Minh Trail, but that fantasy disappeared in a puff of smoke in March 1968 when President Lyndon B. Johnson told an international television audience that he would not run for reelection and retrenchment

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began. When I laid out the plan for Generals Westmoreland and Creighton Abrams, his four-star deputy, Westmoreland said, "I'd like to go to Tchepone [Laos], but I haven't got the tickets." OPLAN El Paso didn't see the light of day until 1998, when I inserted basic elements into my *Military Geography* opus as a case study.

Military Strategy Instructor

There may be no better way for paper pushers of any stripe to share priceless experiences with other officers and

civilians than as professors within DoD's professional military education system. Activities that emphasized military strategy replaced tactical and operational planning for the rest of my military career when I joined the National War College faculty in June 1968. Area studies, which then consumed about half of each academic year, immeasurably broadened the perspectives of students and faculty alike. Lt. Gen. John E. Kelly, impressed by my coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict, said, "You are now director of military strategy studies." My response was, "Sir, I can't even spell *strategy*," to which he replied, "Neither can anyone else. Go make a name for yourself." That challenge changed the remainder of my life.

My first military strategy syllabus taught me more than it taught students because, unlike any other course director, I wrote a brief introduction to each of 19 topics, then posed a series of questions to guide intellectual investigation. The table of contents opened with the fundamentals of military strategy and the nature of modern war, followed by threats, military strategies during the Nixon administration, implementing force postures and a quick look at the impact of science and technology. A comprehensive assessment capped the course.

Open Publication

Paper pushers who write books and articles for open publication can vastly increase their sphere of influence by capturing the attention of readers throughout U.S. national security departments and agencies, academia, think tanks, research institutes, business, the news media, U.S. service schools, allied embassies and military establishments abroad. I therefore expanded my National War College syllabus into a primer entitled *Strategy for Beginners*, which was rejected nine times before the Naval Institute Press finally published it under the title *Grand Strategy: Principles and Practices*. The dustcover crowed: "This is the only book on grand strategy. Liddell Hart's classic *Strategy* contains a seven-page chapter on the subject. Most texts ignore it entirely." The *Economist* in London wryly remarked that if nobody had previously written a book about grand strategy, neither had I. That conclusion, of course, was correct because *Grand Strategy* barely nodded at political, economic, cultural, informational and psychological ramifications. Pluses nevertheless overrode minuses. The August 8, 1975, issue of *Economika, Politika, Ideologiya* in Moscow praised the book for "fundamental research carried out in this complex, multifaceted and contradictory field." Other plaudits followed. Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Spanish editions appeared, the first two without regard for copyright.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton was wrong when he wrote, "The pen is mightier than the sword," because each of those instruments serves best under given circumstances. Military paper pushers working out of sight behind the scenes wield pens that complement warriors' swords every day in ways that are visible to few observers. Their efforts nevertheless help shape sensible command decisions at every level and, in the process, conserve precious lives and resources. ★