



Soldiers Serve as Our Credentials

“What are the implications of Information Age technologies — including digital communications, simulations and computer processing — on professional military education for the 21st century warrior?” That was the question at hand for the conference here at the Naval Postgraduate School.

Would more emphasis be placed on Information Age technologies or the 21st century warrior? And a fault line appeared early on. For the Navy and Air Force, whose sailors and aviators support the machines — the warships, aircraft and missiles — that serve those branches, the emphasis was on new technologies. For the Army and Marine Corps, where machines — rifles, machine guns, tanks, howitzers and helicopters — serve their operators, the emphasis was on the warrior.

The debate between science and soldiers is not new. “I know there exist many good men,” said Civil War Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman in an address to the West Point graduating class of 1869, “who honestly believe that one may, by the aid of modern science, sit in comfort and ease in his office chair, and with little blocks of wood to represent men, or even with figures or algebraic symbols, master the great game of war.”

“I think this an insidious and most dangerous mistake,” he said. “Science may test to a pound the strain on every chord and brace and rod of the most complicated structure, or it may separate the component parts of every mineral; but it cannot penetrate the hearts of men. The soldier in the ranks is not a block of wood or a mere unit; he is a man like yourselves. . . . You must understand men, without which your past knowledge were vain . . . and what is most important of all, you must acquire that great secret of human control by which masses of men are led to deeds of infinite courage and heroism.”

Over a century later, Sherman’s remarks are still the Army’s gospel. “Soldiers are our credentials” is the creed of Army Chief of Staff Gen. Dennis J. Reimer today. Taken from the motto of the Army’s 8th Infantry Division, it came from the reply of assistant division commander Brig. Gen. Charles Canham, during World War II, to a German general who refused to surrender until he saw the American general’s credentials. Turning to the two GIs who had accompanied him, Gen. Canham said, “These are my credentials.”

But as Maj. Gen. Robert H. Scales Jr., commandant of the Army War College, made clear in his remarks to the conference, emphasis on the warrior does not mean the Information Age technologies are being ignored. The Army is preparing for the 21st century on two levels: first, with Army XXI, a specific force designed to leverage new technologies out to the year 2010, and, second, with “Army After Next,” a planning concept that looks beyond the year 2020.

When it comes to professional military education, the Army’s bottom line is the battlefield. “The only schools where war and its kindred sciences can be properly learned,” said Gen. Sherman in 1869, “are in the camp, in the field, on the plains, in the mountains or at the regular forts where the army is.”

True to that heritage, the Army is learning about the 21st century battlefield not only in the classroom, but on the plains at Fort Hood, Texas, and in the mountains at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., with the Advanced Warfighting Experiments of its test-bed 4th Infantry Division. As Gen. Scales said, “Only the Army has conducted free play, force-on-force exercises to give analytical validity to vision and concepts.”

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Among the concepts validated by those exercises is that of "escalation dominance," i.e., raising the level of warfare to a point that the adversary cannot respond. Traditionally, that was done by escalating the level of firepower, but in the future, dominance will be achieved through information dominance, dominance of the exosphere and space, combined with the speed and shock of nonlinear, simultaneous, interdependent global maneuver. The objective is to add "infinite complexity to the opponent's situation while collapsing his ability to act."

Digital communications, simulations and computer processing, the hallmarks of the Information Age, are seductive. But like all temptresses, they can be deadly. "Computers are our new gods," it has been said, "for they give us what we always want from God. They give

us certitude." But as every combat veteran knows, certitude is the one thing lacking on the battlefield. According to Army War College students, the most useful acronym to describe the future battlefield is VUCA, for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

They are factors for which Information Age technologies provide few answers. They can only be provided by the human mind, and preparing the human mind to deal with VUCA is still what professional military education is all about.

(This *Defense Report* was written by Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr., USA Ret., military analyst, author and syndicated columnist.)

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