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1985 AFTERTHOUGHTS

by

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General DePuy passed away on 9 September 1992 following a long illness. He was one of America's most remarkable senior generals in the post-Vietnam War era, a combat leader of two wars. His thoughts on military doctrine, training, tactics and the role of history in shaping modern armies have influenced the way the U.S. Army fights. In seeking a way to illustrate his vision of the Army, the AUSA Institute of Land Warfare staff searched widely in the many professional journals for which General DePuy had written, particularly after his retirement in 1977. In 1985, prior to publication of his oral history interview (originally conducted on 19 March 1979 as part of the Army War College/Army Military History Institute's Senior Officer Oral History Program), General DePuy was given the opportunity to add a postscript. The oral history and the postscript were combined into a Center of Military History publication (CMH 70-23) titled: "Changing an Army: An Oral History Of General William E. DePuy, USA Retired." We extracted the 1985 postscript and are repeating it here verbatim because it examines some issues which continue to have relevance today; additionally, it brings to bear the unique insight, candor and clarity that were so characteristic of General DePuy.

When the director of the Military History Institute informed me that this oral history would be published he also asked if I had anything to add. Reading back over the manuscript it seemed to me that some subjects were not adequately or fairly covered because of the conversational method and the interaction of the participants. In short, some important subjects were dropped in midcourse as our attention turned to something else. Thus, these afterthoughts recorded five years later.

The first topic on which I have some afterthoughts is tactical doctrine. Recently I have given vent to my concern that "maneuver doctrine" has been oversimplified and that a basically good idea

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stands in danger of being corrupted by the uncritical enthusiasm with which it has been surrounded. My central thoughts on this subject are exposed in an article, "Toward a Balanced Doctrine," contained in the November 1984 issue of *Army* magazine, so I won't repeat them here. [William E. DePuy, "Toward A Balanced Doctrine (Synchronization in Maneuver Doctrine)," *Army*, (November, 1984), 18-21.]

A second afterthought is related to the issues of weapons technology. It concerns the vast misunderstanding which I perceived in respect to the impact of technology on tactics. Few subjects have been the target of such loose thinking. On the other hand, nothing could be more important.

First, let me say that the so-called Congressional Reform Movement has been the source of nonstop rubbish on the subject. Unfortunately, they have apparently convinced a large number of otherwise sensible people that high technology is the enemy. They have taken some obvious truths and moved their argument abruptly to the big lie. No reasonable man favors "runaway" technology — weapons that won't work, costs that cannot be borne, or machinery that demands skills not to be found in the military population.

A description of the dark side of the military weapons development program, the worst examples, have been airily ascribed to the whole sincere and difficult search for excellence in the equipment to be provided the US Armed Forces — forces faced with formidable opponents worldwide, opponents who do not themselves shrink from high technology.

Much of the argument would be ludicrous were it not so dangerous. For example, some of the more feverish reformers yearn for the good old days of "low-tech" when our forces were equipped with P-51 fighters and SHERMAN Tanks. In their time, of course, P-51s and SHERMANS were high-tech. But, the baleful effects do not stop with such limited damage. These same worthies have managed to associate high technology with "attrition warfare". Whole battalions of impressionable minds have signed up for these mental gymnastics, this "disarming" concept.

At the same time, the anti high-tech crowd loves maneuver warfare — a concept of fighting which demands the highest technology man can design. The very systems of mobility (M1 Abrams tank, M2 Bradley fighting vehicle, M3 Scout vehicle, AH64 Attack helicopter, and UH60 Blackhawk utility helicopter), firepower (smart munitions and long range delivery systems), intelligence (airborne sensors and analysis centers), and C² (satellite communications, cellular radios, graphic aids to decision making), upon which a maneuver doctrine utterly depends, is a fair inventory of the very highest technology.

The real issue is how to exploit American science and technology for decisive military purposes. How can we defeat our enemies quickly with the least cost in American lives and treasure? The Army has gone after the objective through the "Concept Based Requirements System". It supposes that the weapons systems acquisition process starts, or should start, with military requirements derived from operational concepts. This puts the conceptual people at the head of the line, that is, in the number one spot in a linear sequence.

This is not a bad concept except for one thing. It doesn't work that way. Operational concepts have never been able to "get out front." If you read them carefully — Airland Battle 2000, Army 21, Focus-21, and so on, you will find that they are, in fact, a description of the application of currently understood technology within the mainstream of tactical evolution. Ideas about air mobility *followed* the helicopter, they did not precede it! Go back and read Gavin's "Cavalry — And I Don't Mean

Horses" in the '50s, in *Armor* magazine. [James M. Gavin, "Cavalry, And I Don't Mean Horses," *Armor*, 68 (May-June, 1954), 18-22; and *Combat Forces Journal*, 4(June 1954), 22-27.]

Deep attack, Follow on Forces Attack and Assault Breaker, followed the discovery that we could make smart munitions. There are virtually no exceptions to this sequence. The technology comes first and then the applications, applications that are conditioned and constrained by the tactical concepts, follow.

It is important to understand and accept this relationship. But, the thought goes farther. The relationship between the research community, the developers and the users, is clearly circular. That is, the relationship is interactive and continuously so. As with all circles, there is no point of origin and no endpoint. Research is not conducted without an awareness of potential applications. Development of those applications is not undertaken in an employment vacuum. Concepts of employment are a synthesis of tactical experience and new technical capabilities.

Unfortunately, the circular imperative collides with the linearity of our organizations and procedures, particularly with the rigid temporal linearity of the program and budget process. Every element or link in the chain yearns for the orderly, simple, linear process. The user states a "military" requirement and the research and development community follows orders. How naive!

It is the feedback loops between the creators (researchers), applicators (developers), and exploiters (tactical users), that are critical and enormously difficult to achieve. Linearity hates feedback loops. They interrupt the smooth flow of the program and funding process. They embarrass the user who changes his performance specifications. They cause cost overruns and change test criteria.

I see no easy way out of the dilemma. It calls for an appreciation of the complexity of the relationship and constant vigilance. Let me cite two examples, one good and one bad. The Mechanized Infantry Combat Vehicle — later know as the M2 Bradley — program was interrupted and delayed, and cost increases occurred when the users finally realized after testing that the fighting vehicle needed a two-man turret instead of the original one-man version. The change was made. The developer was mad at the user, and Congress was made at everybody. Yet, it was exactly the right thing to do. This change was the product of a circular, not a linear process.

In the case of the division air defense weapon system, it became apparent through analysis first, and tests later, that the guns alone could not do the whole job. The circular feedback loop cried for the addition of a light missile like STINGER. But, the orderly forces of linearity prevailed — backs were stiffened, necks were bowed, and the Army has a troubled system. Human beings aren't smart enough to move operational concepts beyond the state-of-the-art. People aren't smart enough to *anticipate* the kinds of information that will begin to flow to them from feedback loops *during* research, development and exploitation.

Management has tried to build a fail-safe linear system. Remember "fly before buy," independent testing, and independent cost analysis? Well, to date, management has failed. They should start all over again and accept the circular process. After all, it is easier to move on a wheel than a skid. A stone boat was a linear concept.

The third and last afterthought pertains to the soldier. Reading back over the transcript I don't think I gave the soldier — the private soldiers and the junior NCOs in World War II — a fair

representation. You recall I said that only a small fraction did the fighting. That was true, but it was the product of untrained leaders at every level. To the best of my knowledge, in every army — and my German and Israeli friends verify this point — only a few men are natural, aggressive fighters. The rest respond only to firm, sensible leadership. When casualties are high, leaders go first. In the six weeks in Normandy the 90th Division ran through two to five sets of infantry company officers — 150 percent of the total number of officers in the division, which represented about 2,000 men. This had two effects. First, these junior officers never had time to season, and second, their training was mechanical and technical rather than tactical. The training never did improve, but as the war went on a few survivors accumulated some seasoning through luck and natural cunning. Once the meat grinder of Normandy was broken up, the casualty rates went down and the reciprocal seasoning went up. By the midpoint of the war we had a fair number of smart, tough fighters. Troop performance improved along a parallel path. By the end of the war the 90th was a good division, not brilliant, but good — as good as one could expect, and better than most.

General McLain, a splendid officer, told us when he first arrived that there was nothing wrong with the 90th Division except for its leaders. The troops, he said, were just like those in the best divisions, and he was right. Therefore, the secret to success lies in the selection and training of leaders before the first battle so that the seasoning process can stay ahead of the casualty process. When the opposite happens, as in the case of the 90th Division, a downward spiral occurs and the resultant disaster is a producer of mass casualties without any offsetting contribution to the war effort. In Normandy, the 90th Division was a killing machine — of our own troops!

This leads to the crucial question as to what has been done to avoid a repetition of this process. I am happy to be able to say that the present officer selection and training process is light years ahead of the “peoples’ army” of World War II. It is also miles ahead of the process used during the Vietnam War.

First, the Army now selects its battalion and brigade commanders from among its highest quality officers through a centralized process. The difference in performance, even in peacetime, is startling.

Second, training has been moved to a new and much higher plateau of effectiveness and the credit for the conceptualization of that massive change goes to General Paul Gorman, the revolutionary Deputy Chief of Staff for Training at TRADOC from 1974 to 1977. To Gorman goes the credit for moving from time oriented training — “In the next hour we will discuss the platoon in the attack, or the operation of the PRC-77 radio, or the M-1 rifle” — to performance based training — “At the completion of this demonstration you will be required to place the PRC-77 into operation in the proper manner. If you cannot perform this function you will repeat the instruction on an individual basis.”

From World War I until 1975, the Army followed the Army Training Program which carried a division from individual training through squad, platoon, company, battalion, regiment or brigade, to division, in each arm or service on the basis of so many hours for this and so many hours for that. Men and units proceeded through the program whether they learned or not. Frankly, nobody knew. There were few tests and what there were, were subjective. If you could survive the schedule you were presumed to be trained. The heart of the Gorman revolution was that no soldier proceeded to Step 2 until he had demonstrated satisfactory hands-on performance of Step 1. This same procedure was applied to units. The concept led to the soldiers’ manuals, Skill Qualification Tests, and the Army Training and Evaluation Program. Gorman was also the conceptualizer of the

National Training Center and of advanced simulation and simulator development throughout the Army.

My net assessment of the effect of these two vital programs — leader selection and performance training — is that the performance and battle participation level of the American Army has moved from the 20 percent to the 60 percent level and is rising.

In fact, the whole Army in every department is in great shape. The soldiers, by every measurement, are the best the country has seen in its Army and vastly better than during the draft. Officers are better trained and more carefully selected for command. NCOs are progressively trained in their own education system. Individual performance — as in tank gunnery — has never been higher. Unit performance because of such programs as the NTC is the highest ever achieved in a peacetime Army. The new doctrine is superior to the old and the whole Army is intellectually engaged in that collective enterprise. The image of the Army as portrayed in the press and on television is radically out of step with the realities. It is too bad that the American public does not know what a fine Army they have. Perhaps they are beginning to appreciate the higher quality of this critically important institution. It is not perfect. It is sometimes hard to love. But it is solid and honest and sincere in its unremitting efforts to achieve excellence. It will serve the country well.

This brings me to my last observation — a word about the Army as an institution and a career. The Army has been good to me. It has given me an exciting and satisfying life — a purpose and a fulfillment. The common caricature of military life is one of stultifying regimentation, a narrow and confining life, and a numbing boredom. Perhaps we shouldn't let the secret out that this caricature is not only wrong but is, in fact, a reversal of the facts.

My experience and opinion, particularly after observing the great American industrial establishment at close hand, is that there are more degrees of freedom in a military career than one could find outside with rare exception. The distinguishing characteristic of a command position AT ANY LEVEL is that the incumbent is ON HIS OWN. If he expects to have his hand held — it won't happen. The higher the command the more total is the veil of silence which descends upon the commander. He is given all the elbow room he needs to put the stamp of his own convictions and capabilities on the enterprise over which he presides. He also has enough rope to hang himself should he be inadequate to the challenge. The difference in style and substance between two military commands is as great or greater than that between any two civilian enterprises, and the differences flow from the man in charge.

My advice to the serving officer is to think long and hard before jumping into the "Greener Pastures" on the other side of the fence. You are now in the most productive years of your life in the most important business in the country, and you will find few opportunities on the outside to match those which you take for granted in the Army.

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