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For years the President of the Naval War College was recognized as the naval authority for developing and publishing the doctrine for naval decisionmaking and planning. No President took a greater interest or was more tenacious in devising a comprehensive planning document than Admiral Kalbfus. In his drive to successfully complete this mission, he became a victim of his own stubborn pride and thus violated some of the very precepts he advocated in his Sound Military Decision.

ADMIRAL EDWARD C. KALBFUS AND THE NAVAL PLANNER'S "HOLY SCRIPTURE": *SOUND MILITARY DECISION*

An article prepared

by

Commander Thomas B. Buell, U.S. Navy

The Military Planning Process (MPP) and its teaching is a feature of the Naval War College curriculum that makes the college unique from civilian colleges and universities. The MPP purports to be a proven method by which naval officers can solve complex military problems and express the solutions as plans and orders. The MPP has been included in the Naval War College curriculum since 1910 when it was introduced as *The Estimate of the Situation*. The college President, almost by default, thereby became the sole authority within the Navy on methodology to be used in developing plans and writing operation orders; the Navy Department was apparently content to accept without question whatever the incumbent President saw fit to declare as the current doctrine.

The best way to solve military problems was always a hot issue among naval officers between the two World Wars.

Their conflicting opinions were reflected in the constant revisions of the Estimate, a matter which each new President apparently felt was his duty to perform. Rear Adm. Edward C. Kalbfus had given the subject much thought over the years, and when he became the college President in the summer of 1934, he followed his predecessors' precedent and made as his first order of business another revision of the Estimate.*

"Ned" Kalbfus was a distinguished naval officer of great wisdom, stubborn perseverance, and vast experience in staff and planning duties. He was a ponderous man, a slow thinker, and a

*The development of the MPP at the Naval War College prior to 1934 was well covered in an excellent article by Charles W. Cullen, "From the Kriegssademie to the Naval War College: The Military Planning Process," *Naval War College Review*, January 1970, p. 6-18.

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marine engineer by training who tended to be indecisive in action when flying his flag at sea.¹

Shortly after assuming the presidency, he assembled the staff officers to announce his plans for revising the Estimate. The Estimate was contained in a tidy 42-page pamphlet that was—according to Kalbfus—vague, misleading, and confusing. He therefore charged the staff with the important task of revising the Estimate into a clear, concise exposition of thought that would be the basis of all the work at the Naval War College (largely problem solving and war games). There was no task more important before them; given the task's urgency, he insisted that the work be completed within the current academic year. He stressed that the work would be a group effort and would be subjected to searching criticism (and, by implication, widespread approval) before he would allow the revised pamphlet to be published.²

The Estimate pamphlet which he condemned had been published in 1932 by his predecessor, Rear Adm. Harris Laning. Both he and the President before him, J.R.P. Pringle, felt that the earlier pamphlets had been too long and complex. They sought brevity. Pringle had tried to "cut it down and simplify it."³ Laning's apologia for his version of the pamphlet was that "every sentence in it contains solid meat and that not one idea can be overlooked even though expressed in only one sentence. Perhaps we were too optimistic as to what one sentence can do . . ." ⁴

Kalbfus had told the staff to start revising the booklet in the summer of 1934, but he was unable to supervise their efforts—he was too much involved in the America's Cup races⁵ and his favorite recreation: golf. The staff was also in flux with arrivals and departures. By mid-October, however, Kalbfus realized that little had been accomplished.

The staff was mustered again in late

October, and Kalbfus told them to start the revision anew.⁶ Perhaps to show they had not been entirely idle, the staff said they had given the subject a lot of thought. They had come to believe that the Form (the step-by-step procedure for developing the Estimate) was workable and had changed little in the seven revisions since 1910. The problem was that the Form was too brief, was thereby prone to many wrong interpretations, and therefore needed guidance and instruction on how to use it. For example, the Derivation of the Mission was one of the most important steps in the Estimate. Yet the 1932 pamphlet allotted only nine sentences to explain how to derive a mission. Kalbfus agreed with their analysis, but the project had dawdled for months. Now he impatiently gave them 1 week to propose an outline for a revised Estimate that would instruct on how to use the Form, if that was what the staff felt was important.⁷

The staff struggled for another month, and Kalbfus became increasingly unhappy with their poor progress. Clearly they needed command guidance, so toward the end of November 1934 Kalbfus published a lengthy memorandum that was the first indication of the sweeping scope of the work he envisioned.⁸

First, the revision would not be piecemeal as in earlier years. Rather, it would address the process of logical thinking at whatever depth and length that was necessary before considering the details of the Estimate. He promised, however, that although the pamphlet would undoubtedly become much larger, it would not contain "unnecessary verbiage and repetition" and that it must be accepted as relevant by "critical" naval officers.

The magnitude of the revision had expanded so enormously that the word "revision" had become inappropriate. Kalbfus had committed himself and the Naval War College to a project equiva-

lent to a monumental dissertation by a classical philosopher: the art of logical thinking and reasoning that was appropriate for every conceivable military situation.

To prepare for the task, Kalbfus told the staff to read all previous Estimate pamphlets as well as a number of papers, lectures, and pamphlets on military planning. Yet by the summer of 1935 the staff had produced nothing that satisfied Kalbfus, and his original deadline had come and gone. He decided to write it himself.⁹

Help arrived in the summer of 1935 when a 39-year old Army infantry major, Edward S. Johnston, reported aboard as a student in the senior course. He was a University of Indiana graduate, an intellectual, and a prolific writer on the art of war. Johnston had fought bravely and well in World War I and then had become a military scholar: Infantry School as both student and instructor; Command and General Staff School, again as both student and instructor; Chemical Warfare School; and the Army War College just before coming to Newport.

Perhaps his most important paper was an original military study entitled "Field Service Regulations of the Future," published in late 1935 in the *Review of Military Literature*. The paper had condemned the *Army Field Service Regulations (FSR)* which had purported to contain the Army's doctrine for making war. In Johnston's mind, *FSR* should have been applicable to war of any sort and to units of all kinds and sizes. It should have contained fundamentals which would never change and have avoided details that changed with alterations in organization and equipment. The *FSR* at that time fell short of this, employing restrictive methods rather than universal fundamentals, thereby inhibiting original, creative thinking.

Johnston held that there were a few simple factors that determined success

or failure in war:

- The object to be attained.
- The means available and in opposition.
- The conditions of the theater.
- The consequences of failure.

The influence of each factor varied with each situation, and the commander, in developing his plans, was expected to weigh the factors using sound reasoning and commonsense.

Johnston had developed his enlightened views in 1934-1935 while serving on an Army War College committee charged with discovering "the simple but basic factors involved in military planning and execution" of joint operations. Their mission was identical with what Kalbfus was trying to do at the Naval War College, so there is good reason to believe that Kalbfus arranged for Johnston to be ordered to the Naval War College in the summer of 1935. Johnston's views were in harmony with those of Kalbfus; Johnston would provide creative, inspirational ideas; Kalbfus was stymied in his project, needed help, and was getting only resistance from his own staff naval officers.

A former staff officer recalled Johnston's arrival.

There were rumors about his coming to the college and bringing with him new ideas that would startle or disturb the tranquility of the place . . . I looked forward to his arrival with interest and some apprehension. He turned out to be a pleasant fellow who took an interest in the course, did his part, was never too talkative or opinionated and never overbearing. He was tall, sandy haired, wore glasses and was generally the intellectual type rather than the military type.¹⁰

All through the 1935-1936 academic year, Kalbfus labored on his magnum opus. He wrote draft after draft and endlessly discussed his ideas with others; he was a man embarked upon a noble

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crusade, seeking answers to all the questions and doubts concerning military thinking. Johnston served as his collaborator, but he was so discreet that no one was sure at the time of his exact contributions. Today, however, it has become apparent that Kalbfus incorporated many of Johnston's ideas while revising others. Certainly Johnston served as a sounding board for Kalbfus' ideas and stimulated the admiral's intellectual creativity.

Kalbfus' first draft of the new Estimate, although incomplete, was published on 64 mimeographed pages on 12 May 1936. It was distributed to the students, who were directed to read it and submit written comments before they graduated 2 weeks later.

Kalbfus anticipated many of the criticisms he was certain would be directed at his work, and in his memorandum of promulgation he included justifications for what he had done.

He anticipated that some would say that it was too long. His response: "A subject of this character would seem to require complete treatment which, in turn, renders volume unavoidable. Before the finished product is issued, however, an effort will be made to serve the interests of brevity but not at the expense of inadequacy of treatment."

Others might say it was too complex. Again: "The naval profession is complicated and all efforts of man to reduce the collective operations of mankind to a few brief, terse statements have failed."

These two criticisms would be repeated again and again over the years with each succeeding version of his Estimate, and Kalbfus would stubbornly repeat his two justifications for length and complexity. His supporters would hold that his work was enlightened and inspired; it was unfairly damned because the average naval officer refused to think deeply and wanted easy answers to difficult problems. On the other hand, his detractors decried the cumber-

some Kalbfus writing style which made a difficult subject even more difficult because of his inability (or refusal) to write clearly. Kalbfus' writing implied that profound thoughts needed a ponderous vocabulary for proper expression.

Too much of his writing amounted to trivial and pseudo-scientific statements of the obvious. His work also suffered from trying to cover all possible cases so that his theories would be universally applicable. For example, his May 1936 draft addressed his theory of how the human mind solved problems.

The normal human being, naturally and often without deliberate consciousness, takes action only after the employment of a mental process which follows a certain clearly-defined course. A circumstance, or a combination of circumstances [all possible cases!] gives rise to a perplexity which may or may not indicate that the need for accomplishment exists. If, in the digestion of facts and information surrounding the circumstance, there is seen to be a necessity for action there follows a recognition or grasp of the end to be attained by an effective solution of the problem involved. There then begins an evaluation and balancing of the factors which enter, after which suggested solutions occur to mind. Following an evaluation of these the most promising is selected and action proceeds on that basis.

But many new ideas were hidden beneath his baffling prose, for those who had the time and patience to dig them out. New ideas to the Navy, that is, because Johnston's thoughts (expressed in his paper on *FSR*) were evident everywhere. For example, his four fundamental considerations—the object, the means, the theater, and the consequences—were repeated intact by Kalbfus. In fact, he held that these four

fundamentals applied to any kind of problem solving, military or otherwise. Kalbfus ultimately called them *Factors as Universal Determinants in War*. As another example, Kalbfus repeated Johnston's theory of unity of effort: all elements of one's forces must work in harmony toward a common goal.

Perhaps the most important concept suggested by Johnston and incorporated by Kalbfus was the test for choosing the best own course of action (OCA). Johnston called the test *Consequences of Failure*. Kalbfus ultimately renamed it *The Fundamental Principle for the Attainment of an End*. The principle comprised a three-part test:

(1) *Suitability*: Will the OCA accomplish the mission?

(2) *Feasibility*: Have we the resources to carry out the OCA?

(3) *Acceptability*: Is the cost worth the gain?

Again, Kalbfus held that this principle was applicable to any human activity. Naval officers will, of course, recognize this test as an important part of today's MPP.

Kalbfus also addressed the question of *Enemy Capabilities versus Enemy Intentions*, always a controversial item at the War College. Curiously enough, Johnston did not address this in his *FSR* paper. Kalbfus decreed, once and for all, that plans had to be based on capabilities. Even if one knows the enemy's intentions, they could change at any time. One's plan, therefore, had to consider all the enemy's capabilities.

But Kalbfus was vague and contradictory in defining enemy capabilities. He did not distinguish the subtle difference between the enemy's capabilities to carry out his mission and the enemy's capabilities in countering one's own mission. For example, in May 1936 he implied that every enemy, every time, had a mission that had been carefully developed to offensively counteract one's own offensive plan.

One should disregard the enemy's

capability to simply react to one's own offensive action, he said; that kind of capability would amount to a "tacit forfeiture of the initiative" by the enemy. In other words, for every action caused by your plan, the enemy had a corresponding plan that would produce an opposite reaction.

Then Kalbfus became ambivalent. What if you did not know the enemy's plan, as was the usual case? Well, he hedged, then you considered the most probable effect desired by the enemy. But what if you did not know that either? In fact, what if the enemy had no plan at all that would oppose the plan that you had in mind? That he would simply react, using whatever capabilities were at hand? Kalbfus raised more questions than he answered.*

The last few days before graduation were a poor time to ask War College students to read and analyze a document as complex and bulky as Kalbfus' first try at his new Estimate. Many students did not turn in their comments before they graduated, so Kalbfus relentlessly pursued them by mail to their next duty stations, demanding their written analyses. He also mailed copies of the first draft to a number of naval associates, soliciting their comments.

The last week in May 1936, Kalbfus again assembled the reluctant staff and assigned four committees to review the students' comments (and any other analyses then available) in order to further refine the new Estimate. Three of the committees were headed by the best brains at the college, all captains: Robert A. "Fuzzy" Theobald, Raymond A. Spruance, and Richmond K. "Kelly" Turner. They had a month to

*In his final 1942 version, Kalbfus finally came around to the doctrine that is used today. Since the planner usually does not know the enemy's mission or objective or effect desired, Kalbfus suggested that "In such cases, the commander is compelled to consider all possible enemy courses of action that can materially influence his own plan."

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do their work. Kalbfus wanted to get the final version printed in time for the new class reporting in July. The committees worked long hours and sacrificed their normal leave, argued loudly among themselves, and accomplished little.

Kalbfus' work was so controversial that few remained neutral. A minority approved of what he had done, saw the value of his work, and tried their best to help him clarify his abstract concepts. Many disapproved but hesitated to tell the stern and formidable Kalbfus their true feelings. Others, knowing Kalbfus considered himself an embattled reformer seeking recognition for his work, sought his favor with obsequious praise for his work. Others, like Spruance, thought it was useless and said so.

Harsh words were exchanged within the staff and student body. At least two friends became enemies.

Kalbfus was aware of the opposition to his work. He wrote a friend,

We here are criticizing it in detail and very severely . . . I received here much loyal and profound advice to the effect that a treatment of this sort was not only unnecessary but that it would confuse the Service . . . [but] if a treatment which went down to the bottom of this thing would confuse the Service, then I would suspect the state of thought in the Service rather than the general character of the treatment.¹¹

In other words, Kalbfus had completely reversed his earlier policy that his new Estimate would have to be acceptable to the service. It now appeared that the service was expected to change and come around to his way of thinking. And he was determined "to throw my last ounce of energy into making it a structure which will stand the test of the real thinker."¹² He never defined a "real thinker" or how many officers whom he expected to use his

Estimate were in that category.

Kalbfus meanwhile had disposed of the nine hallowed Principles of War: Objective, Offensive, Superiority, Cooperation, Simplicity, Economy, Surprise, Movement, and Security. For decades, naval officers had believed that a successful plan had to contain all nine principles. Kalbfus strongly argued against this notion from the rostrum before both staff and students.¹³ A single noun cannot be a principle, he said. A principle had to be a statement of a proven and accepted universal truth. A single word was open to many interpretations, as well, and thus meant many things to many men. Therefore there was no common agreement of what the nine "principles" meant in the first place.

Nonetheless, even assuming that men could agree on the meaning of those nine principles, Kalbfus could not accept that those nine alone summarized all that one had to know about making war. "That there are no other vital factors can scarcely be accepted as final," he argued.¹⁴ "To include 'Simplicity' while ignoring 'Flexibility', 'Loyalty', 'Time', and about fourteen million other factors, cannot be supported by any logical process with which I am familiar."¹⁵ Furthermore, even if other factors involved in making war could be agreed upon, it was still necessary to apply the proper weight to each principle, depending upon the circumstances of the problem. Again and again Kalbfus raged against those who believed "that war can be waged by rule and that sound decision can be reached through the use of a form."¹⁶ He wanted naval officers to learn how to think and to reason so that they could solve any problem under all circumstances and conditions.

All through the summer of 1936 he wrote letters to friends, vindicating his aims and denouncing his critics. He wrote that he was not satisfied with version 2, published in July 1936. He

would publish version 3 before the end of the year, refining and improving the Estimate even further.

So Kalbfus stubbornly plodded on, determined more than ever to finish his work despite the increasingly strident criticism. Although once he had sought universal approval, he now no longer cared if others condemned his cherished dream. Those who disagreed with him were not "critical thinkers." To a staff officer who had supported him, he wrote, "I am not satisfied that a group of student officers who have been here only a week is competent to criticize one way or the other."¹⁷

Then, with bitter sarcasm, he continued,

In order, however, to meet the wishes of those who think that war can be waged by following an outline or form, there is such an outline in the back of the pamphlet, and those who do not wish to elevate their intellectual plane by digging into fundamentals are free to confine their efforts to the folder at the back of the pamphlet.¹⁸

Beleaguered and surrounded by foes, he became susceptible to flattery from those seeking to ingratiate themselves. An obsequious captain reported to the staff when the furor was at high pitch. The day after reporting he went to Kalbfus "with his face glowing" and said that the new Estimate was superb and met every test of logic. Even Kalbfus could not swallow that statement, but he was grateful for a new ally nevertheless.¹⁹

Kalbfus' work took on new urgency, because he knew he would be leaving the college at the end of 1936. He wanted the third and final version published before he left.²⁰ He continued to correspond with Johnston, then stationed in Washington, who in turn helped Kalbfus by mail as best he could.

As 1936 drew to a close, the question arose about what to call the new

pamphlet. The *Estimate of the Situation* was inadequate to convey what Kalbfus' book would contain. The new title which would be forever remembered emerged in a Kalbfus letter written when his work was nearly finished.²¹

I am fully aware of the fact that I tackled a tremendous job when I attempted to set forth anything resembling a treatise on the subject of Command. But I have felt . . . that such a thing is necessary, and whether or not every vestige of my effort is thrown in the waste paper basket, I at least have made an attempt to bring this important consideration before the Service.

For years, this College has hammered along the lines of an Estimate of the Situation, and I am certain that a very positive impression has been gained . . . that success can be attained by following a form. Now, the fact is that one has to think, and think hard, all of his life to get a grasp of what war means and involves. To hammer home a form without any background is to put the cart before the horse.

Kalbfus then explained that he wanted his treatise to take precedence over the Estimate form.

For this reason I have . . . changed the name of the pamphlet so that it now reads "Sound Military Decision . . ." It is professional judgment we are after and not familiarity with a form. I am fully prepared to have the idea rejected by the Service and the reason given that the old time religion [was good enough for me] . . . But . . . as Nelson said when he closed his signal book at Trafalgar, "Now I can do no more." I am not satisfied with the product, nor would I ever be satisfied with it if I worked on it for twenty five years. But if it

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starts even a certain few to thinking . . . I will feel that the effort has not been entirely in vain.

Kalbfus left in December 1936 to fly his flag at sea as Commander, Battleships, Battle Force, with a concurrent promotion to vice admiral. A year later he was promoted to admiral and took command of the entire Battle Force.

His successor at the War College, Rear Adm. C.P. Snyder, became President in January 1937 and inherited *Sound Military Decision (SMD)* hot off the press. After evaluating it for a year, he followed the tradition of the Presidents before him and decided it needed revision. The Snyder revision was published in May 1938, and its main features were modest attempts to clarify Kalbfus' more obscure passages.

Kalbfus was furious that Snyder had tampered with his work and threatened to send Snyder an outraged message of protest. A staff officer and former War College associate, Capt. C.J. "Carl" Moore, prevailed upon Kalbfus to sleep on the problem before taking such a drastic measure, pointing out that Snyder had improved and not hurt the content of the book. Next day Kalbfus had calmed down and agreed with Moore.²

Kalbfus returned as War College President in mid-1939 and resumed his work on *SMD*. He was again assisted by Johnston, by then a lieutenant colonel, who had returned to Newport to serve on the staff. In March 1942 Kalbfus published the fifth and final version of *SMD*. It contained 243 pages, compared to the 62 pages of his first edition and the 42 pages of the 1932 version he had inherited when he first became President in 1934.

It had a green cover and soon became known as "The Green Book" and "The Green Hornet." Thousands of copies were printed and distributed throughout the Navy in World War II, because it was the only written guidance available for naval officers (especially inexperienced

Reserves) who were involved in developing the tens of thousands of plans and orders used in the war.

The book's usefulness in World War II is difficult to ascertain. Only eight pages were dedicated to instructions for writing an operation order. Its one-page "sample order form" was used without deviation for all written naval plans and orders throughout the war. In this respect *SMD* had a useful purpose. To what degree the remainder of the book contributed to the war effort is conjectural. Probably it met the same objections during the war that it did at the War College in the late thirties. Furthermore, planning officers in war had little time to cogitate upon Kalbfus' abstract theories. They were under pressure to rapidly develop orders and undoubtedly would have appreciated a brief "how to do it" instruction manual in lieu of Kalbfus' prolix prose.

Adm. Raymond A. Spruance became President of the Naval War College in March 1946. He had opposed *SMD* ever since its inception in 1936. Spruance, a brilliant intellectual, had not opposed its objectives but rather the style of writing. His vast experience in planning his Central Pacific amphibious campaigns confirmed his conviction that *SMD* did not meet the needs of the Navy.

Spruance's first official act as President of the War College was to replace *SMD*. Kalbfus was then living in retirement in Newport. His heart must have been broken.

Spruance believed that a standard planning publication, under the authority of CNO and not subject to the whims of each new War College President, had to be established. This objective was achieved, and under Spruance's initiative *The Naval Manual of Operational Planning* was conceived, developed, and promulgated. It developed over the years into today's familiar yellow book: NWP-11 *Naval Operational Planning*. Spruance was also

responsible for developing a standard form that was used by all the services for plans and orders.

SUMMARY

The crusade of Admiral Kalbfus is reminiscent of the first chapter of St. John: "He was in the world . . . and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Kalbfus had the very noblest and grandest of aims: to foster the art of military thinking and reasoning in war. He correctly perceived that much military thinking in the thirties was stagnant, narrow, confined, and unimaginative. Strategy and tactics were being developed using an abbreviated form that resembled a cookbook recipe whose ingredients were the nine Principles of War. Kalbfus recognized that war was an unbelievably complex business that required a mind that was unencumbered by confining rules yet guided by proven fundamentals. He sought to define those fundamentals, then describe how they could be used as touchstones to help the creative and imaginative mind think and reason about the art of war.

His lofty goal was not unlike that of all great philosophers and teachers over the ages: the exercise and development of the human mind in the search for truth and knowledge. Kalbfus' goal is therefore not open to question; his capability and methods to achieve his goal are another matter.

Consider first his capabilities. Kalbfus obviously believed in himself and in his intellectual capacity to produce a written work that could achieve his goal. His correspondence contains no hint of self-doubt or of lack of confidence. However, Kalbfus borrowed heavily from Johnston, so *SMD* certainly is not original. On the other hand, it is not clear that Kalbfus was inspired by the works of the classic philosophers or the recognized military theorists,

sources which certainly would have offered considerable guidance and food for thought. Therefore the genesis of *SMD* apparently sprang from the minds of Kalbfus and Johnston.

Kalbfus had ample justification for the enormous task that he undertook. He was President of the Naval War College, and the college was the natural place (indeed, the only place) for the creation and development of advanced theories and concepts on warfare. So, in fact, Kalbfus energetically did what it was his duty to do. It was immaterial whether he was best qualified for the task, because he was the only senior naval officer at the time who was sufficiently interested in higher, abstract military thinking to reduce his thoughts to writing. So even if in his own mind he privately admitted he was unequal to the task, at least he was willing to try! There have been few flag officers who have worked as hard and as long as did Kalbfus on the difficult and onerous chore of creating and writing abstract theories of warfare.

Assume then he was intelligent and had a burning desire to pursue his noble goal. His capability must be judged by what he produced in *SMD*. Much is of permanent value and is the basis of today's MPP. For example:

- The Four Steps in the Solution of a Military Problem.

- The Estimate of the Situation and the Decision.

- The Detailed Plan.

- The Directives.

- The Supervision of the Planned Action.

- The test for Suitability, Feasibility, and Acceptability.

- The emphasis of Enemy Capabilities.

- The de-emphasis of the Principles of War.

There is much more of value contained in *SMD* that is appropriate for further study and enlightenment on the art of war, but these considerations are

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beyond the scope of this paper.

So much for the capabilities of Kalbfus and the strengths of his writing. His methods and the weaknesses of *SMD* must be considered as well.

His letters and actions portray Kalbfus as being overly sensitive to criticism, and he allowed his stubborn pride to get the better of his sense of judgment. Any writer who publishes a major work before a large and critical audience must be prepared to have his naked ego exposed on the firing line, especially if his views are new or unorthodox. Writers react in different ways when the brickbats start flying their way. Kalbfus was ambivalent. He encouraged criticism but rejected it as ill-founded and prejudiced if it conflicted with his own views for his work. He stubbornly refused to admit that his work had grave defects, and eventually he listened only to flatterers who did little more than to encourage him to enlarge upon his earlier mistakes. A faithful few—principally Kelly Turner, Carl Moore, and Edward Johnston—recognized the value in what Kalbfus was trying to do and sought to help and encourage him. But Kalbfus, stung by his critics, refused to change his style of writing, which was his work's greatest weakness. His pride and his ego caused him to lose his objectivity, and he simply shut his ears to all criticism, whether justified or otherwise.

The gist of the criticism was two-fold: few could understand his writing, and the scope of his work was inappropriate for those who had to use it.

The greatest knowledge in the world, the most wonderful and inspiring revelations, are not of much value unless they are expressed in a language that is easily understood by those who need to know. Kalbfus was writing for a large and plain-spoken audience, but he refused to speak their language and they would not learn his language. His contention that his abstract theories could not be simply expressed doomed any chance of

sharing his knowledge with his audience. He thereby defeated both himself and most of the potential good his book had to offer.

The other criticism was that the scope of the book was inappropriate for its intended use. But its intended use was never clear. Kalbfus was ambivalent. On the one hand, Kalbfus held that it was intended solely for Naval War College students, and he seemed reluctant to ask CNO to distribute it to the Fleet. On the other hand, he often stated that it was written for the planning officers in the Fleet who were without the benefit of War College training—the book's explanations of the military planning process were to substitute for what was taught at Newport. In any event, thousands of copies were distributed to the Fleet in World War II, because *Sound Military Decision* was the only manual for naval planning in existence.

CONCLUSION

Sound Military Decision was unsuitable for use by officers in the Fleet at war because it was too complicated to

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Comdr. Thomas B. Buell, U.S. Navy, is a 1958 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and graduated from the Naval Postgraduate School in 1964 with the degree of bachelor of science in electrical engineering.

He has served four operational tours in destroyers, most recently as Executive Officer, U.S.S. *John King* (DDG 3). Commander Buell is a 1971 graduate of the College of Naval Command and Staff. He is now assigned to the Naval War College to participate in the Professional Development Program and is conducting independent study and research in 20th-century naval warfare.

responsible for developing a standard form that was used by all the services for plans and orders.

SUMMARY

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His lofty goal was not unlike that of all great philosophers and teachers over the ages: the exercise and development of the human mind in the search for truth and knowledge. Kalbfus' goal is therefore not open to question; his capability and methods to achieve his goal are another matter.

Consider first his capabilities. Kalbfus obviously believed in himself and in his intellectual capacity to produce a written work that could achieve his goal. His correspondence contains no hint of self-doubt or of lack of confidence. However, Kalbfus borrowed heavily from Johnston, so *SMD* certainly is not original. On the other hand, it is not clear that Kalbfus was inspired by the works of the classic philosophers or the recognized military theorists,

sources which certainly would have offered considerable guidance and food for thought. Therefore the genesis of *SMD* apparently sprang from the minds of Kalbfus and Johnston.

Kalbfus had ample justification for the enormous task that he undertook. He was President of the Naval War College, and the college was the natural place (indeed, the only place) for the creation and development of advanced theories and concepts on warfare. So, in fact, Kalbfus energetically did what it was his duty to do. It was immaterial whether he was best qualified for the task, because he was the only senior naval officer at the time who was sufficiently interested in higher, abstract military thinking to reduce his thoughts to writing. So even if in his own mind he privately admitted he was unequal to the task, at least he was willing to try! There have been few flag officers who have worked as hard and as long as did Kalbfus on the difficult and onerous chore of creating and writing abstract theories of warfare.

Assume then he was intelligent and had a burning desire to pursue his noble goal. His capability must be judged by what he produced in *SMD*. Much is of permanent value and is the basis of today's MPP. For example:

- The Four Steps in the Solution of a Military Problem.

- The Estimate of the Situation and the Decision.

- The Detailed Plan.

- The Directives.

- The Supervision of the Planned Action.

- The test for Suitability, Feasibility, and Acceptability.

- The emphasis of Enemy Capabilities.

- The de-emphasis of the Principles of War.

There is much more of value contained in *SMD* that is appropriate for further study and enlightenment on the art of war, but these considerations are

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meet their needs. What is or would have been appropriate for the needs of the Fleet is constantly under active discussion and is beyond the scope of this paper.

Sound Military Decision should have been published separately and allowed to stand or fall on its own merits. Kalbfus abused the powers of his office by forcing it upon an unwilling and unreceptive Navy. Kalbfus should have allowed the staff simultaneously to develop a planning document that could have been more useful to the Navy in World War II, while he proceeded with his personal treatise that would have

been suitable for senior officers at the highest levels of command and staff. Nevertheless, Kalbfus' stubborn pride blinded him to what the working officer in the Fleet really needed.

The irony of the 8 years of development of *Sound Military Decision* is that if Kalbfus had ever used his own theories to test the soundness of his decision to write the book, he could not have justified what he was doing. He lost sight of his objective, there was no unity of effort within his own command, and the book would never have survived the test of Suitability, Feasibility, and Acceptability!

FOOTNOTES

1. Oral History of Rear Adm. C.J. Moore, USN (Ret.), Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport, R.I., p. 594-5 (hereafter cited as NHC).
2. Letter from Rear Adm. E.G. Kalbfus to Adm. J.M. Reeves, USN, 10 October 1934, NHC.
3. Letter from Capt. J.K. Taussig, USN, Chief of Staff, Naval War College, to Comdr. J.T.G. Stapler, USN, 18 January 1929, NHC.
4. Letter from Rear Adm. Harris Laning to Capt. M.H. Simons, USN, 10 October 1932, NHC.
5. Kalbfus to Reeves.
6. Memorandum for the Staff, Naval War College, 23 October 1934, NHC.
7. Memorandum from Comdr. M.L. Deyo, USN, to President, Naval War College, 1 November 1934, NHC.
8. Memorandum for the Staff, Naval War College, 22 November 1934, NHC.
9. Moore Oral History, p. 542.
10. Letter from C.J. Moore to author, 7 October 1972.
11. Letter from Kalbfus to Rear Adm. J.W. Greenslade, 5 August 1936, NHC.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Sound Military Decision* Draft #1, May 1936, p. 8, NHC.
15. Kalbfus to Greenslade.
16. Kalbfus to Rear Adm. W.L. Rodgers, 27 August 1936, NHC.
17. Letter from Kalbfus to Comdr. J.M. Deem, USN, 11 July 1936, NHC.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Kalbfus to Greenslade.
20. Kalbfus to Capt. D.C. Bingham, 13 July 1936, NHC.
21. Kalbfus to Bingham, 17 November 1936, NHC.
22. Moore Oral History, p. 549.