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Principles of War and Their Application to Strategy and Tactics

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PRINCIPLES OF WAR AND THEIR APPLICATION TO STRATEGY AND TACTICS

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The task of the Naval War College mission is to further an understanding of the fundamentals of warfare, with emphasis on their application to future naval warfare. Accordingly, it is my purpose this morning to examine some of the fundamental truths of war and to indicate how these so-called principles of war are applicable to strategy and tactics.

Although exact definitions of the fields of war—strategy, tactics, and logistics—are difficult to arrive at, and may create futile discussion as to semantic distinctions, some definitions are desirable as a basis for study and discussion.

The dictionary of U. S. Military Terms for joint usage, issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, defines strategy and tactics as follows:

Strategy is defined as: "The art and science of developing and using the political, economic, psychological, and armed forces of a nation, during peace and during war, to afford the maximum support to national policies, in order to increase the probabilities and favorable consequences of victory and to lessen the chances of defeat."

It may be noted that this definition of strategy is broad in scope. It includes not only the military aspects, but also the political, economic, and psychological aspects of a nation's conduct, during

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both peace and war. It has as its purpose not only the winning of war, but also of winning the peace by increasing the favorable consequences of victory. In this sense the term is often referred to as "national strategy", or "grand strategy". When the term strategy is restricted to the employment of armed forces it is sometimes spoken of as "military strategy", and it is in this sense that I shall use the term strategy in this discussion.

Tactics is defined as: One, "The employment of units in combat", and two, "The ordered arrangement and maneuver of units in relation to each other and/or to the enemy."

Recent developments in the scientific field, such as radar, long range rockets, and guided missiles make it difficult to determine just when forces may be said to be in contact with the enemy, or even in combat, and, it becomes difficult to differentiate between strategy and tactics. And, although it may be impossible to say at just what point the field of strategy, of tactics, or of logistics leaves off and another of these fields begins, there are certain fundamental principles which govern in all three of these fields of warfare. These are the principles of war—principles which may be applied to arrive at strategic, tactical or logistical concepts of war.

It has been said that the only thing constant in war is change itself. Throughout history, new inventions have dictated changes in strategy, tactics, and logistics. As for naval tactics, we can observe, for example, how the cannon changed the tactics of ramming and boarding to one of maneuver and fire concentration out to the maximum gun range, or how Naval Air has changed the Battle Line concept of capping the "T" of the enemy line to the Carrier Task Force concept of striking a crippling blow against the enemy fleet at the extreme range of the attack plane.

Let us consider for a moment the ten chief tactical principles formulated by Lord Nelson and employed by him with such success. They are:

1. The principle objective is the complete annihilation of the enemy's fleet: partial victory is not enough.
2. Concentration of own masses against enemy fractions.
3. A close and decisive action is necessary.
4. Units must support each other and keep close to the enemy.
5. It is necessary for subordinates to know the plans of the commander-in-chief, whose principal business is to bring the enemy to action on the most advantageous terms.
6. The division of large fleets into squadrons whose commanders have full discretion.
7. Consideration of the moral qualities of an adversary is an essential factor.
8. The order of sailing is the order of battle, and the less maneuvering the better.
9. "Time is everything", and simplicity of method is desirable.
10. Victory must be followed up.

The basis of these tactical doctrines is the principles of war —the principle of the objective, of mass, of the offensive, of maneuver, of simplicity. However new weapons have dictated changes in these tactical concepts. No longer is close action necessary to destroy the enemy, and no longer is the "order of sailing the order of battle". Thus, it may be seen that, while tactics are fluid and ever changing, certain fundamental truths or principles of war are constant. It is the *application* of these principles which is variable, and not the principles themselves.

Often strategic and tactical changes have been slow in following the development of new weapons. To those nations who have first shown an appreciation of the strategic and tactical significance of new weapons, there has accrued a distinct, and sometimes, a decisive, advantage. For example, it was many years before the armies of the world appreciated the tactical significance of the maneuverability of fire power in the tank, motorized artillery and infantry, as embodied in the German Panzer Division. Yet, the decisive role that the Panzer Division played against the static defenses of the Maginot line is without question.

Today, with unparalleled advances in new weapons, it is essential that we develop new strategic and tactical concepts in order to realize the maximum effectiveness from the tools available. Similarly, intelligence as to the developments and techniques of our possible enemies takes on an added significance.

We must answer such questions as these. How, and under what circumstances, should we employ the atom bomb? Is it to be used primarily in a strategic or a tactical sense? How may the enemy use the bomb? What active and what passive defense measures should we employ against the A bomb threat? From a Naval tactical viewpoint, what changes must we make in our dispositions for cruising, for battle, for amphibious assault? And the same type of study must be given to the implications of the many other new developments—the jet plane, the rocket, the guided missile, and the true submersible.

In early 1939 the old battleships *New York* and *Texas* were given what is now called radar equipment for full scale test afloat. It was then a secret weapon in the development test stage. The implications of this new weapon were enormous. It was reported on along these lines: It is the greatest invention since the

advent of radio; it will revolutionize naval gunnery and tactics. It was recommended that an immediate procurement program should be initiated to equip at the earliest possible time all battleships, carriers, and cruisers. As we review that report today, it was prophetic. And, yet, someone along the line was slow in appreciating the urgency and soundness of those recommendations and decided to contract for only six (6) equipments to be installed in cruisers for further test and evaluation. Thus, a year or so, was largely lost, in a period of an impending crisis, during which we could have equipped a major portion of our fleet with radar, developed our technique, and trained our personnel in its employment and maintenance. I cite this example for two reasons; first to emphasize the enormous importance of adjusting *quickly* our tactical concepts to new weapons; and secondly, to indicate that there are times when a new weapon should be expoited when it is a serviceable one—without waiting for the technical people and the scientists to produce what they consider to be a perfect, or near perfect, instrument. There are other times, however, when new weapons should not be employed until they are available in quantity. This will be indicated in later discussion.

It is possible to find many instances of the technical bureaus' keeping a weapon in the test stages long after it was serviceable, searching for this or that answer—which might well have come sooner if it had been put into service and given operational field tests. We might now do more toward getting the bugs out of some of our guided missiles, for example, and, certainly we could do more toward developing strategic and tactical concepts as how best to employ them if they were put into production now and gotten out to the operating forces. Time may be running out. And it takes time to develop techniques and train in the employment, servicing, and maintenance of new weapons.

Korea should prove an excellent testing ground for new weapons and new strategic and tactical concepts based on such weapons. To so make it, a deliberate and studied program should be initiated. The opportunity we have there is analogous to that which Germany utilized so effectively in Spain prior to World War II.

Our tactical concepts today are largely those of World War II and need close examination and study to adapt them to the new weapons being developed. It is a real challenge to condition our minds, not to World War II but to World War III concepts. It is not enough in solving military problems to dive into USF2 or USF4 or FM101-10 and come up with an answer. Use them, yes; but, by all means, try to devise something better than cruising disposition 4C or battle disposition 4M—something which considers the new weapons we have, and those which the enemy is likely to have.

Now what to use as a basis for these new concepts? **The Principles of War.** They are based on all of military history and have stood the test of some revolutonary weapon developments and radical concepts of how to employ weapons.

Before presenting them, a few words of caution concerning their application are in order. They should not be considered as if they were religious tenets, but rather as guides in planning and executing military operations. The correct application of any one, or several of them, will not assure success, particularly when, at the same time, another of the principles is violated. In fact, the correct application of all of the principles may not assure success providing the morale forces are lacking. The human elements—morale, discipline, leadership—are so vital to success that they deserve our first and uninterrupted attention. You will recall that according to Napoleon "Moral force is to the physical as three to one." There

is always present the danger of becoming so engrossed in the theory, art, or science of war (whatever you choose to call it) that the human factors are lost sight of, the initiative restricted, or the imagination dampened. There is also the danger of making the assumption that these principles are all inclusive and offer a magic formula to resolve any military problem. A military commander must resolve for himself what the principles of war imply, and how they should be applied.

Clausewitz, a century ago, included the "gaining of public opinion", as one of the three fundamental objectives in war. It is probably just as important today—if not more so—than it was 100 years ago, but to my knowledge it is not included in any present day listings of the principles of war. Nevertheless, one should exercise in the application of the fundamentals of war in studying military history and in the solution of military problems, until their use becomes second nature. In the heat of battle, application of these principles should be sub-conscious, not self-conscious.

Currently the Army Command and Staff School lists nine principles of war of the United States Army. The principles are:

1. The *Objective.*
2. The *Offensive.*
3. *Mass.*
4. *Maneuver.*
5. *Surprise.*
6. *Security.*
7. *Economy of Forces.*
8. *Unity of Command.*
9. *Simplicity.*

Although you will not find the principles of war listed in any of the USF publications, as such, you will find the fundamental truths embodied in these principles in the doctrine and instructions contained in the Fleet Publications.

The War Manual of the Royal Navy lists a total of ten principles of war, which are, for the most part, identical to those taught in the U. S. Army. They do not, however, include Simplicity; instead they list Maintenance of Morale and Administration.

Using the Command and Staff School list I shall make a few comments on each of the principles, with particular emphasis on their application to naval strategy and tactics.

OBJECTIVE

If any of the principles may be said to be more important than the others, that one is the principle of the objective. It is certainly fundamental, for it defines the mission or the aim.

From the national strategic level it defines our national objective or aim. In war it implies the imposition of our nation's will upon that of the enemy. From the level of high military strategy it implies the imposition of our will by destruction of his will to resist, and normally, but not necessarily, entails the destruction of a large portion of his armed forces.

At every level of command the proper selection of the objective is of the greatest importance. Properly, it should be one which supports the objective or mission of the next higher level.

An excellent example of maintenance of the objective, (and I might say here that the British call this principle "Selection and

Maintenance of the Aim" rather than simply the Objective) is Admiral Spruance's action in defending the landing operations in the Marianas against naval air and naval surface attack instead of rushing out to meet the oncoming Japanese Fleet. The primary mission was an offensive one—the seizure of the Marianas. That mission could be best accomplished by isolating the objective area and defending against any incursion by the enemy. Admiral Spruance, keeping in mind the primary mission, took a course of action which would most nearly assure that mission being accomplished.

Generally, in a naval engagement the tactical objective may be considered to be that part of the enemy's sea-air forces which has been selected for destruction or neutralization. By tactical maneuvers one's major forces should be brought to bear on that part of the enemy's which it is important to overwhelm, the Battle of Midway is a splendid example of a proper selection of the physical objective. Although the Japanese troop ships were tempting targets, the carriers were the main threat and were therefore chosen as the primary objective.

OFFENSIVE

This principle stems from an aggressive state of mind or a will to destroy the enemy. It is characterized by a desire on the part of the Commander and his subordinates to get at the enemy and to destroy him. Nelson embodied that spirit in his tactics of closing the enemy and annihilating him. It entails an assumption of the initiative and of denying the initiative to the enemy.

The principle of the offensive does not imply that the defensive should be ignored. Clausewitz contends that the defense is "the stronger form of warfare" and that therefore a weaker foe

has a fair chance of assisting a more powerful one. Passive defense measures, such as assuming tactical dispositions best suited to defend against threatening attack, are essential to avoid destruction. But the defensive measures should be employed so as to permit the seizing of any opportunity to take the initiative and to counter-attack with all the violence at one's command. The defensive must always be assumed in the spirit of the offensive. It may, for example, be assumed merely as a time device to gain time to mass the necessary forces at the proper place and at the proper moment to commence the attack.

The offensive does not imply headlong attack. It seeks to bring a vigorous and timely concentration of forces against a weaker concentration. A splendid example of the application of the principle of the offensive was had in the action of the Allies in landing in North Africa in 1942, on which occasion the initiative passed to us and our allies and remained with us for the remainder of the war.

If the assumption of the offensive is going to comprise the chances of carrying out a mission, it may be necessary to assume the tactical defensive. For example, the mission of an Escort Commander of getting a convoy through might well require him to maintain a strong defensive formation and position and thus restrict his initiative in closing and attacking a threatening force.

Care must be exercised in assuming the offensive that one's own force is not over-extended or dissipated to the point that an enemy counter-attack will be successful. The principle of the offensive implies a well-timed, well-coordinated attack at a decisive point. But it implies more than that. It implies an attack within the capabilities of the forces making the attack, in order that it may be sustained and followed up. Sustaining the offensive

is of such importance that some military students include in the principles of war the principle of pursuit. The success with which the German air force pursued the break-through in the low countries and in France in the last war and with which Montgomery's "Desert Rats" pursued Rommel certainly indicate that pursuit is a vitally important aspect of the Offensive if not deserving of a classification as a separate Principle of War.

MASS

This principle goes by many names—superiority, concentration, force, and power. It does not necessarily imply an over-all superiority in numbers. It does imply a superiority of fighting power at a decisive point.

To enumerate all the factors of fighting power would be an insurmountable task, but some of the main factors, as far as naval power is concerned, are fire power and fire concentration including air power, ability to withstand punishment, maneuverability, and, of course, the human factors, such as morale and leadership. And, although a superiority may be enjoyed in several of the factors, it may not be enough if one or more of the others is lacking. For example, in spite of the enormous material superiority which the Japanese enjoyed at the Battle off Samar, the poor leadership of the Japanese Forces deprived them of an impressive tactical victory, if not a strategic one.

MANEUVER

Movement is the means by which plans are placed into effect. Maneuver, then, may be said to be the catalytic agent which fuses together the other principles. By mobility, forces may accomplish

mass or surprise. It gives to the Commander flexibility and freedom of action which he might not otherwise enjoy.

Movement does not necessarily imply rapidity, although speed is frequently a vital factor in war. Movement is a relative matter, particularly in a tactical sense. Certainly, the importance of thinking of movement in terms of relative movement or relative motion need not be emphasized to officers of your experience. And, the importance of rapid, secure, and reliable communications in taking full advantage of the principle of movement is obvious.

Three of Jomini's four fundamental principles of strategy are just as fundamental to naval tactics, and emphasize the enormous part that movement plays in the art of war:

"1. *Maneuvering* in such a manner as to engage one's major forces against parts only of those of the enemy.

"2. In battle, by tactical *maneuvers,* bringing one's major forces to bear on the decisive area of the battlefield or on that part of the enemy's lines which it is important to overwhelm.

"3. Arranging matters in such fashion that these masses of men be not only *brought to bear* at the decisive place but that they be *put into action speedily* and together, so that they may make a simultaneous effort."

In each of these principles, *maneuver* and *mobility* is the key to their successful application.

And it is this principle of movement or mobility which gives such strength to carrier air power. The ability to move carriers quickly from the South Pacific to meet the Japanese threat at Midway permitted our Navy to strike a blow at the Japanese Forces of

such consequences as to change the balance of naval power in the Pacific and to change the complexion of the war from the strategic defensive to the strategic offensive. And while air power is in a tactical sense highly mobile, it is not so in a strategic sense, unless the enormous air base installations and logistic requirements are available where required, or unless it is carrier borne. It is then, from this principle of movement or mobility that naval air power draws its great strength.

SURPRISE

Surprise may be said to be a two-bladed weapon. On the one edge it is capable of inflicting great initial damage on the enemy; on the other of affecting adversely enemy morale, sometimes to the point of throwing him into complete confusion and thus making possible his destruction before he is able to regain his balance.

Many things are conducive to effecting surprise—secrecy, deception, careful planning, faultless and rapid execution. Most important and often the most difficult to attain is secrecy, particularly today with the great emphasis which is being placed on Intelligence and with the many means available to collect intelligence. And yet, it appears that it is still possible to effect surprise—at least initially on a grand scale, for there is little evidence available to refute that the invasion of south Korea came as a complete tactical surprise, if not as a strategic one.

This principle may be applied in the nature of surprise as to time, place, force, technique, direction, and weapons employed.

An excellent example of naval tactical surprise as to time is in the Battle of Savo Island, where the Japanese cruiser force arrived on the scene much ahead of the time that it was expected they might, if indeed they were expected at all, with the result

that four Allied cruisers were destroyed in almost as many minutes, before any effective fire could be returned on the Japanese attack-ing force.

There are many examples where new weapons have come as complete tactical surprise—tanks, gas, magnetic mines, influence fuses, atomic bombs. Seldom, if ever, have they been decisive in determining the outcome of the war, even though it appears that the new weapons, in some instances, might have been capable of so doing had they been fully exploited by the power which first had those weapons. The difficulty arises from the failure to employ them in mass, and from the failure to withhold them until such time as they can be so employed on a continuing basis. If surprise is to be most effective, it must be employed in conjunction with the other principles of war, particularly mass. New weapons often present contradictions which affect materially how and when they should be employed. The longer they are withheld, the greater the chance that the enemy will learn of them, especially when they are placed in mass production and when large numbers of personnel are en-gaged in training in their employment. Furthermore, it is a gamble to divert a large portion of one's war potential to the production and to training in the employment of a new weapon not battle-tested. It would appear that in World War I, the British might have been able to change the whole course of the war had they withheld the tank until it was available to the Allies for use in large numbers; or, in World War II, that the Germans might have been able to bring England to terms had they not employed the magnetic mine until they were able to do so in such mass as to tie up all shipping seeking ingress or egress to the British Isles. Instead, both of these new and revolutionary developments in war-fare were employed initially on a small scale and Before they could be used in mass. Thus, the opponents succeeded in developing a

countermeasure or a defense against them, as has always been true when a new weapon is employed.

As for the atomic bomb or the H-bomb, weapons of mass destruction, they can hardly be classed now as weapons of strategic surprise by virtue of being new weapons. However, they may be used as weapons of tactical surprise, both by us and the enemy, as to time, place, and technique of their employment. It, therefore, behooves us to give serious study to the offensive and defensive tactical implications of this new weapon. Having lost its effectiveness as a new weapon of strategic surprise, might it not be employed to advantage tactically as well as strategically?

Before leaving this principle, I should like to point out that one of the inherent strengths of sea-air power is its ability to achieve surprise, both strategically and tactically. Mobility and weather are two factors which greatly contribute to this ability.

Some may contend that as a result of new developments such as long range all-weather search planes, equipped with A. E. W., it is no longer possible for Carrier Task Forces to achieve surprise. On that I should like to make these observations. The achieving of tactical surprises will be more difficult. However, if developments in carriers and carrier-based all-weather long range attack planes and A. E. W. planes are permitted to go ahead, the achieving of tactical surprise should still be possible. As for strategic surprise, the comparative strategic mobility of carrier-based air forces, as opposed to that of great land-based air forces, will still make it possible for carrier air power to achieve strategic surprise. It is significant that Germany was not able to move any appreciable amount of air power to resist the movement of the Allies onto the beaches of Normandy.

SECURITY

Security includes all measures to deny to the enemy the means of gaining intelligence or of inflicting damage on own forces. It also embraces means to obtain information about the enemy in order to institute better security measures, such as protecting own lines of communications.

It implies a defensive attitude, but there are occasions when the offensive must be assumed to gain the necessary security for own forces. For example, the offensive was assumed in our landings at Guadalcanal in order to obtain security for our lines of communication to Australia while we were still on the strategic defensive.

Among the passive measures which may be essential to security from a naval viewpoint are: radio silence, combat air patrols, electronic countermeasures, air searches, ASW patrols, radar pickets, zigzags, radio and radar intercept watches. These and many others may be employed to avoid the enemy's taking one's forces by surprise and to better enable one's own forces to be prepared to resist attack and to counterattack effectively.

Before leaving this principle of security, there is another aspect thereof which is today more significant than at any time in history since the Trojan horse; that is, security on the home front, security against the fifth column, and security against subversion and sabotage. These may be the most powerful weapons in the enemy's arsenal, unless we are forever on guard and take the offensive against them whenever and wherever the occasion demands.

ECONOMY OF FORCE

Economy of Force implies a proper proportionment of available forces both in regard to space and time. It aims at effecting mass at the decisive place at the proper time. To do so may necessitate a reduction of forces at other points to those required to maintain the bare minimum of security. It, thus, entails a compromise between concentration and dispersion. It should aim to effect the desired concentration of own forces while, at the same time, causing the enemy to disperse his forces.

Although economy of force does not imply, in a tactical sense, cutting down all along the line to bare essentials, it does imply that in the strategic sense. For, as the scope of wars seems ever to increase and the limit of the nation's natural resources to decrease, it becomes more and more urgent that we weigh continually the gain against the cost and strive to proportion properly our sources of national strength, such as manpower, critical materials and industrial capacity. Both, strategically and tactically, the selection of proper weapons to be employed is of vital importance in application of the principle.

Economy of force, like that of surprise, again brings out inherent strength in sea-air power. The strength is derived, in the application of this principle, from the ability of sea-air forces to concentrate great striking power at any one of many points about an enemy's defensive perimeter, thus making him disperse to meet this ever present threat. During the past war in the Pacific, the Fast Carrier Task Forces were employed on the strategic offensive (and it should be noted that Admiral Nimitz and the Joint Chiefs opposed any operations which would, for an extended period, tie these forces down to a defensive role). Thus employed, they were able not only to inflict great material damage on the Japanese forces, but, probably

more important, they were able to require a wide dispersion of enemy forces, especially air forces, and to make possible the isolation of any objective.

And, in spite of some contentions to the contrary that never again will major amphibious forces be employed, circumstances and economy of force may dictate that such a course of action is best.

In the last war with Allied troops concentrated in the British Isles and the necessary air and naval forces available to project them against the continent of Europe, Germany was forced to disperse her defenses from Norway to the southern coast of France. Thus, both sea-air and amphibious forces permit own forces to be concentrated, while, at the same time, requiring the enemy to disperse his forces.

UNITY OF COMMAND

Unity of Command implies cooperation. In fact, until recently, the Army Command and Staff School called this principle the Principle of Cooperation. The British still do.

With the advent of the Western Union and the Atlantic Pact, this principle takes on a significance far greater than ever before, for it aims at unified action, not only among armed forces of our nation, but among all the nations with a common aim. It has, as its root, a spirit of unselfishness, a feeling of confidence in leadership, and a desire to do, within the limits of capabilities, what is necessary to accomplish the objective without seeking for one's self, one's ship, one's service, one's nation, any glory except that which may accrue, in the course of events, from doing that which needs to be done for a common cause.

It is a principle to which we must constantly direct our attention. The cooperation which characterized the relations between the United States, Britain, and the British Commonwealth Nations during the past war was excellent. The problem of attaining a similar degree of cooperation and unity of command among the twelve (12) North Atlantic Pact Nations is one of the greatest magnitude.

There is an ever growing feeling among the Atlantic Pact Nations that Unity of Command must be effected if that Pact is going to succeed in accomplishing its objective. That feeling has been expressed in recent speeches of such leaders as Mr. Churchill and Mr. Spaak.

Cooperation, fortunately, is something which can be learned and nurtured in our daily contacts. It is a spirit which must be developed before the heat of action. And it must be developed to such a degree among our Allies that Unity of Command will be attained.

SIMPLICITY

Simplicity is a principle which may be applied to many factors in war—among others, organization, planning, order writing, maneuver, weapon and equipment design. It makes for order and tends to eliminate the well known process of order—counter-order—disorder.

Many of you will recall how our fleet maneuvers, during a period between the two world wars, became more and more complicated, year by year, until we got to the point that the captain of a capital ship needed one of two signal officers, a tactical officer and a couple of plotters to assist and advise him in formation maneuvers,

and how the three or four signal halyards were kept, almost constantly chock-a-block with bunting. I recall how one of our Admirals used to deplore, with great rage, that tendency, and point out that, during his tour of duty as a destroyer skipper in the Irish Sea during World War I, the only special flags or pennants that he ever saw were Corpen, Turn and Speed. He said that we must simplify our maneuvers if we ever got into action. Our Fleet did not appreciate that fact until we did get into a shooting war, when it became necessary that we revise our tactical concepts; or at least our techniques of maneuvering. However, in the field of amphibious warfare, there still remains much to be done to simplify those inherently complicated operations.

Simplicity in order writing has many virtues. It reduces the verbiage, it reduces the load of communications, it adds to security, and probably most important of all, it may give the subordinate some freedom of action and permit him to use his initiative. One of the keys to this is to tell WHAT is to be done and avoid telling the subordinate HOW it is to be done.

In conclusion, strategy and tactics, like war itself, are ever changing and depend on weapons. As new weapons become available, new strategic and tactical concepts for their employment must be evolved, and evolved quickly. The best guides we have available in developing these new concepts, in the absence of a shooting war, during which they should and can be evolved and tested, are the Principles of War—objective, offensive, mass, maneuver, surprise, security, economy of force, unity of command, and simplicity. While it may seem at times that these principles are contradictory they are in fact complementary, the application of any one or several of them may not assure success. The necessary blending of them all is essential. But even more essential are the human factors of morale, discipline, and leadership.