

Vice Admiral [unclear]
SENIOR CLASS OF 1933

THESIS

The Relationship in War of
Naval Strategy, Tactics, and Command

Submitted by

W. F. Halsey, Captain, U.S. Navy.

Room No. C-16.

DEPARTMENT OF INTELLIGENCE

Naval War College

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Vice Admiral Wagener of the German Navy discussed Naval Strategy as follows;

" The science of geographical position, its changes and maintenance, with respect to trade routes. Offensive strategy is the acquisition of such position. Defensive, the maintenance of it. Strategy is bound by the configuration of the coast, and is determined by the proximity of sea lanes to the geographical position. The strategic plan is determined by geography. How far the plan may be carried out is determined by relative strength."

" The strategic position of the British at Scapa Flow was complete. The English trade routes were in the Atlantic out of reach. Their primary mission was to exercise command from the position. Therefore, their strategic plan was defensive. This had nothing to do with relative strengths. They had the perfect strategic position, their plan was to defend it. If this position were threatened, the British would have been compelled to fight. The British had the command of the seas from their strategic position, therefore they had no need to fight."

" The German position was located in the Bight. It had no relation to the trade routes. Since a position has strategic value only when it threatens the trade routes, the value of the position was zero. It was a dead angle in a dead sea. The British had no reason to attack it. The German operation plan was the strategic defensive. The British position controlled the trade routes of the world. The German controlled no trade routes. Geography dictated that the German plan should be the strategic offensive."

" Strategy consists of obtaining a strategical position from which one may contend for the mastery of the sea lanes. The strategic offensive is subject to a definite law. The operation plan drives the fleet from one position to another. When a position is attained which is at least equal to the enemy's position, the struggle for position ends and the fleet is ready to fight for control of the sea routes. Therefore, a maritime operation plan depends solely on strategic position and not on relative strength."

" A fleet without the position may be powerless against a much weaker fleet. This sea strength runs through the entire scale, dependent upon strategic position. The peace negotiations is the place to expect naval strategy. English world politics has been directed to the acquirement of positions on the trade routes."

At first glance, if we accept Admiral Wagener's definition and conclusions, it would seem as if our hands were tied in a war with ORANGE. A more careful study, I believe, will not support this view.

" The failure on the part of governmental officials to exercise due diligence, honesty, and effectiveness in maintaining, safeguarding, and promoting the welfare of their nation, in the face of economic competition, would amount to culpable violation of a sacred trust."

" If our people understood these principles better; if they had not been blinded to them by propaganda; if they would accept it as normal, inevitable, and even praiseworthy, for foreign officials to advance the interests of their own country at our expense; then the existence of a grand national strategy abroad would be realized, and its steady operation against ^{US} recognized in America. Once American perception in these matters becomes adequate, the

critical weakness of our national strategy will be understood, and this will be the first strengthening step." ¹

Strategy has been defined as that which proceeds contact, tactics as that which follows. Or as General Forrest so aptly expressed it; "Get there furthest with the mostest men." In a narrow naval sense, strategy consists in the maneuvering and jockeying for position before the fleets are in contact; tactics the jockeying for positions of advantage after the action opens.

There is no sharply defined line between naval strategy and tactics. One flows from the other. With modern fleets covering extensive areas, particularly when ~~xxxxxx~~ employing surface, sub-surface, or aerial advanced forces; part of the fleet may be maneuvering strategically, while another part is tactically engaged. Hence the relationship between naval strategy and tactics is intimately established.

It is the men that count in the final analysis of battle. Other things being equal, the battle will go to the more ably commanded and better trained fleet. As the training of the fleet is a direct function of command, this statement may be narrowed. The result of the battle lies in the hands of command.

No two fleets will be similar, ship for ship. If the two forces were equal in the aggregate, a situation hard to visualise, they would certainly differ in types. One side would have the greater number of ships of a certain type, while the other would lead in a different type. This brings us to a second important function of command, organization.

The efficiency of the fleet is directly dependent on the soundness of the fleet organization and the internal organization of the individual ships. This organization may be by types or forces

or a combination of the two. To be efficient, it must be elastic to meet changing conditions. The chain of command within the fleet must flow directly from the commander-in-chief, down through the type or force commanders, to the subordinate commanders, and thence through the commanding officers and the ships organization. This illustrates the necessity for standard organization throughout the service.

The commander-in-chief of a fleet can not exercise personal supervision over the individual ships. It is perfectly possible and probable that few vessels, other than the battle line, will take part in the final engagement. The other forces may have been expended in attriting tactics, or they may be engaging in a different area. How then can the commander-in-chief exercise his function of command?

The commander-in-chief must convey his intentions to his subordinates through a plan or plans. These plans assign tasks to the subordinates. Discretion is left to the subordinate in executing these tasks. The controlling thought of the subordinate must be, will my action support the plan. If this thought is constantly present, no action by the subordinate can be far wrong. The plans may be written, verbal, or of common understanding. It is needless to say that a good plan, not understood, is worse than useless. How can the great number of subordinates arrive at a common understanding?

By training and the much abused word indoctrination. All fleet training has for its purpose the conducting of fleet strategy and tactics in an orderly and efficient manner. Individual ship's gunnery practices are for training the ship to bring her guns to bear effectively on the enemy. This is elementary tactics. Division

tactical and gunnery exercises are advanced steps in tactical training. They train the division commander and his subordinates to bring pressure to bear on the enemy, in an expeditious and orderly manner. Force practices are a still further advance in tactical training. The fleet manœuvres in fleet dispositions might be termed the post graduate training in tactics. Fleet problems furnish the training in strategy, and if time permits emerge into a tactical problem. Every participant from the junior commissioned officer to the commander-in-chief learns something in these exercises. A constant series of these evolutions enables us to keep abreast modern practices, and to make changes to meet the introduction of new weapons and materials. By participating in these exercises throughout his service career, an officer is being constantly trained to assume command.

Indoctrination is arrived at from many sources. Primarily through fleet training. Historical studies and the study of the art of war must supplement this training. Game board manœuvres are an excellent place to try out new ideas, and to discover the mistakes one may commit when confronted with the responsibilities of a situation. The game board may disprove some previously accepted ideas.

~~Next paragraphs~~

Fleet problems and Force practices are followed by critiques or discussions. These discussions give a broader view of the details of individual movements and the motivating causes. ~~Discussions~~ Suggestions for improved methods of handling the fleet are discussed, and mistakes are uncovered. This is a valuable practical part of the education of an officer for high command.

The conferences held by commanders with their immediate subordinates are a most important part of an officers training. Many valuable suggestions are made at these conferences. Points not

understood are ironed out, and the subordinates learn the commander's ideas and reactions. Ideas can never be so clearly conveyed in writing, as they can by personal and intimate discussion. In this way, and in this way only, can the commander impress his personality upon his subordinates.

This brief discussion of command would be incomplete without mentioning some of the pitfalls. A commander may become so fascinated and engrossed in his planning, that he assumes the initiative rightfully belonging to the subordinate. His plans may become so complicated, so detailed, and so manifold; that it is a practical impossibility to follow them. In the formulation of these many detailed plans, in the effort to meet every conceivable contingency, the chain of command becomes so upset, that groups are hopelessly divided and subdivided. This does not work for the efficiency of the forces. It is of the utmost military importance that the subordinate should know their immediate superior in command; and it is of greater importance that the commander should ^{Know} his subordinates, their capabilities and limitations. To live and work together breeds teamwork, and no force is efficient without this. No matter how many stars are gathered together, if the team is being continually shifted, it will be an easy victim for a mediocre opponent. It is of paramount importance that unit groups be not broken up, except by urgent necessity. We have all seen this violated many times and always to the detriment of the team.

In this day of easy and fast communications, the temptation of a commander to interfere with a subordinate acting independently, is very great. From the information available, it is very easy to size up the situation in a distant theatre. It is also easy to size up this situation entirely wrong. The man on the spot

may have information, not available to the commander, that gives an entirely different picture. The subordinate must be trusted, or if not trusted removed. The commander should furnish the subordinate with all available information, and leave the execution of the mission to the man on the spot. To interfere may be to invite disaster. By the same token, the man on the spot must act and act now, and never commit the unpardonable offense of asking instructions. He has all the available information, and knows or should know the commanders' ^{intentions.} ~~instructions~~. In other words the naval team must play ball and play ball hard.

The last great pitfall is complicated and unnecessary instructions. While slogans are so popular in this country, we of the Navy might well adopt: "Tell him what to do, but not how to do it." There are many unnecessary and irksome signals sent in the fleet. Conversely, there are many unnecessary questions asked by subordinates. To again use a hackneyed word, "indoctrination" will cure most of these evils. All hands must think along the same lines.

The most vital factor in command is the military character and the moral qualities of the commanders. The commander-in-chief is the keystone of the fleet. He must be a presence that is felt throughout his command, and he must be known and trusted down through the lowest rating. His subordinates must feel that he has their well being always close to his heart, and that they have a leader whom they will gladly follow in battle. With this spirit victory must come. The commander-in-chief must have a pleasing personality, rigid uprightness of character, a niceness of personal appearance, and be a strict disciplinarian, tempering justice with mercy. In other words he must be the embodiment of the expression, "An officer and a gentleman." His courage both moral and physical must be unquestioned. This is a high ideal, but the closer this ideal is approached, the greater the leader. Down through the

subordinates this ideal should be striven for. With a band of officers seeking the same ideals, brought up in the same school of thought, and actuated by the same patriotic sense of duty, we have attained Nelson's "Band of brothers." Under such conditions command will reach its greatest efficiency.

From the national mission flows the mission of all subordinate commanders. The President of the United States informs the Navy Department of the national mission. The Navy Department, through the Chief of Naval Operations, issues the necessary basic plan to the fleet. This plan contains the decision from which the mission of the fleet is derived. This decision is strategical. The commander-in-chief makes his estimate of the situation. His decision may be strategical or tactical, or a combination of both. The subordinate task commanders, in turn, arrive at their decisions. It is thus seen that the mission of each echelon of command is derived from the decision of the next higher echelon. The mission states the task and the purpose. The decision states: what to do; how to do it; and why. From the national mission comes the task to be done, and the purpose for doing this task. This task then becomes the "why" of the Chief of Naval Operations decision. The "what" and "how" are arrived at by the course of reasoning outlined in the Estimate of the Situation. The "how" of the decision of the next higher echelon, becomes the task of the mission of the immediate subordinate. The "what" of this decision becomes the "purpose." In like manner the tactical mission is derived from the strategical decision. Thus the war operations flow from a single source. If the decisions throughout the echelons of command are based on sound naval strategy and tactics, the relationship in war of naval strategy, tactics, and command is established.

A brief outline of a hypothetical war between BLUE and ORANGE may illustrate the point I am endeavoring to make. To revert to Admiral Wagener. " Naval strategy is the science of geographical position, its changes and maintenance, with respect to trade routes. Offensive strategy is the acquisition of such position. Defensive the maintenance of it." The vital trade routes of ORANGE have a focal point near their home islands. The Far Eastern trade routes of BLUE have a focal point close aboard. The geographical position is in Far Eastern waters. ORANGE controls this position, so her strategy will be defensive. BLUE must exert offensive strategy in order to acquire this position.

ORANGE is in much the same position as were the British at Scapa Flow. If their position is threatened they will be compelled to fight. They have the command of the sea in that area, and unless threatened have no need to fight. BLUE must wrest this position from ORANGE. Geography dictates that the BLUE plan must be the strategic offensive.

Rear Admiral Courtney states: " Sea power consists of the fleet and position. The fleet is tactical. The position is strategic. The fleet exists for the purpose of fighting for the trade routes." There are two methods by which the command of the sea may be attained. One is to contain and the other to destroy the enemy fleet. The strategy of the contained fleet would be to raid the enemy commerce. The strategy of the containing fleet, would demand protection for their commerce. The fleet that has destroyed the enemy fleet has still a strategic mission. They must blockade the enemy and drive his commerce from the seas.

The BLUE fleet must be moved to Far Eastern waters. This move is strategic. To meet attrition attacks from the enemy

the fleet and accompanying train must be kept in defensive formation. This is tactical. The ORANGE strategy demands that they retain the geographic position they now hold. The BLUE fleet is superior to the ORANGE. If the BLUE fleet is permitted to cross the ocean unmolested, they will be in full strength to attack the inferior ORANGE fleet. ORANGE strategy demands that this strength be reduced, and that the relative strength of the two fleets be more nearly equalized. This calls for attrition. After leaving their base in the Hawaiian or Aleutian Islands, the BLUE fleet must keep to the sea until they reach the Philippines. ORANGE has many islands that may be organized as bases, flanking any possible BLUE route. BLUE has the superiority of force, while ORANGE has superiority of position. This is an excellent illustration of the strategy of position. ORANGE must search for and locate the BLUE fleet. This search is strategic. The maintenance of contact, and the dissemination of information becomes tactical.

The attrition attacks combine the strategic and tactical. The seeking of position for launching the attacks, and the bringing of the attacking force to the point of contact is strategic. The actual attack is tactical. The night attack of destroyers, or the attack of submarines, utilizes the tactical element of surprise. The air attacks attempt to bring a superiority of force against the enemy at a given point, a well recognized tactical principle. Isolation of part of the enemy forces, so that superior forces may be brought against them, will always be attempted. This is the same tactical principle. The principle of attrition is entirely tactical, inasmuch as it utilizes various tactical principles to seek to reduce the strength of the enemy.

The strategy and tactics of the two forces are the ser-

vants of command. One is evasive and protective. The other is secretive and offensive. The manner in which these tasks are performed is a direct function of the will of the commander. His is the control of a highly organized force that moves as he wills, and as he wills so goes the fortune of the war.

Clausewitz defines the battle as the means of strategy. "A naval battle receives its decisive purport from the fact that a strategic position is conquered. The battle is then the means of strategy. Unless brought on by chance, a battle which is unnecessary is never fought. When one possesses something that the other must have in order to live, and which cannot be yielded without dying, the battle takes place. Such battles are decisive, others merely inflict damage. There is no tactical will to battle, only to inflict damage. The war is composed of two factors, the tactical and the strategic; the battle is tactical, the strategic the effect."¹

Command is the nerve centre that directs, controls, and coordinates the strategic and the tactical. They are command's right and left hand. As command controls these hands, so command controls the war. Strategy, tactics, and command may be called the trinity of war; and the greatest of these is command.

FINIS.

L. VICE ADMIRAL WAGENER GERMAN NAVY.

