

*Little*

THE ESTIMATE OF THE SITUATION.

Lecture delivered by  
Commander Frank H. Schofield, U.S.N.

at the

Summer Conference

U.S. Naval War College,

Newport, R.I.

June, 1912.

(1914 Edition.)



## THE ESTIMATE OF THE SITUATION.

In the paper on Training for War Command an attempt was made to show the relation of the estimate of the situation to the general scheme of training. It is a method of applying knowledge and judgment to concrete situations. It is a natural method, one used unconsciously in every day life. A situation arises requiring action. We decide what the situation requires. We think of what difficulties have to be overcome, what ways we have of overcoming them, and finally how we will go about the task. In this is the whole process of the Estimate of the Situation. For example:-

Situation: Your hat has blown off.

Your Job: To get the hat.

Difficulties: Hat is rolling along the ground away from you. Stops occasionally, then goes on.

Eventually it will bring up.

Ways and Means: You may walk after it, but will probably have a considerable walk and will lose time. May lose the hat. You may send a boy to run after it. You don't see boy and cannot wait for one. You may run after it yourself, This is the surest way and saves time. So --

You Decide: to run after the hat yourself.

Here is a method of reasoning. It stands the test of everyday life. It has stood the test in peace time training for war command, for a century. It is, so far as we know, the one best way of examining a war situation. It is so far as we know the one best way of investigating military problems. For the present we will stick to this method. In this paper an effort will be made to describe the method. This has been done in other years and in other papers. We are quite new to this particular form of training.



We learn a little each year about the methods involved and their application. To bring each branch of the subject up to date we make use of the efforts of others and add our own effort to theirs. The first paper on the Estimate of the Situation presented to a Summer Conference was prepared by Commander Marble and read to the Conference of 1910. The second paper was prepared by Commander Vogelgesang and read to the Conference of 1911. Both of these papers have been freely used in the preparation of this paper. The method described in those papers is the method described in this paper.

An Estimate of the Situation is that logical process of thought which applied to a concrete problem leads to a definite decision.

The Estimate of a Military Situation involves a thorough study, from the commanders point of view, of all the conditions affecting the situation. This study is made, according to the method of prescribed, under three heads as follows:-

- (1) The Mission.
- (2) Enemy Forces, Their Strength, Disposition, and Probable Intentions.
- (3) Our Own Forces, Their Strength, Disposition, and Course Open to Us.

The study of the situation culminates in,

- (4) The Decision.

A problem that is presented must be studied until the situation it describes is thoroughly realized. The data given in the statement of the problem is known to the commander whose estimate and orders constitute the first requirements of the problem.

The problem solver must imagine himself that commander. He should picture on the chart the situation that confronts him, the forces and their disposition. Pins and pieces of



colored blotting paper are useful for this purpose. He must study distances, local conditions, time of year, relation of the area of the problem to the theatre of war, and above all he must study his instructions. All this is preliminary to the determination of Mission. All this must be done with care for there is no surer aid to the execution of a military task than a clear conception and an equally clear statement of what that task is. Some may consider this unnecessary, that no one is apt to misconceive his mission or be led astray in its execution through neglect to definitely and concisely state that mission to himself. Experience has shown that the statement of a problem to men whose strategic and tactical ideas have not been coordinated by training will result in marked diversity in the statements of the mission. If there is not uniformity in the determination of the mission there will be wide diversity of decisions.

We are working for unity of action. If the statement of the same problem to all can provoke the same statement of mission from each, then we have taken a sure and necessary step towards unity of action. Given a situation we will then all have the same understanding of the task that situation imposes.

How shall we arrive at uniformity in the statement of the mission? The first step is a clear comprehension of instructions. Usually the mission flows directly from instructions or orders of a superior. These orders may be quite general and may leave much to subordinate initiative. In such a case the mission is the task imposed by the situation as a necessary step in the accomplishment of the general mission laid down in instructions. The Mission in any Estimate of the Situation is the task which must be undertaken to meet that situation. It is not the task which you



think may have to be undertaken later nor does it comprehend that task. It leads up to and makes ready for the accomplishment of other tasks indicated by instructions and by the probable flow of events. In war new information is constantly coming in. Some information is so important that it clearly constitutes a new situation. A mission is then determined which projects intention a certain distance into the future. The mission will project into the future only so far as the commander can be reasonably certain that events will not interpose to provoke a change of mission.

It is important that the relation between mission and orders from superiors be thoroughly grasped. Every military situation incident to a state of war derives its importance from its relation to the war as a whole. The most successful conduct of war requires that each act of war be directed towards the attainment of the object of the war. War is not simply fighting, it is fighting for the attainment of a definite purpose. Now since each act of war should be in harmony with the general purpose it is evident that there must be a supreme control to direct the acts of war. This control is exercised by the Commander-in-Chief. He is cognizant of the general purpose. He plans the way that purpose is to be attained. His plan assigns tasks to forces. The success of his plan depends in part on how intelligently his subordinates execute the portions of the plan allotted to them. If they, on their own initiative, change their part of the plan the Commander-in-Chief then is no longer working with a plan that is a whole but with several plans of parts. The plan of the part may succeed but the success may be worthless because it does not fit into the plan of the whole. The Mission must normally be derived from the orders you have received. There is nothing so important in war as obedience. We do not advise mechanical obedience. Ask first "What was my



superiors intention regarding this order? What may have been his views on this subject? What information did he have when the order was issued? What additional information have I now? How would this information have affected my superiors order?" It is only thus that dead mechanical obedience is avoided and active obedience combined with initiative is produced.

There is another point that comes in here that is discussed by Ingelfingen as follows: "It is never a good thing in war to criticise the measures of superior authorities not even quietly in your own mind, because you cannot place yourself in their positions. In war all orders from superior authority should be considered as decrees of fate, like rain and sunshine, day and night, and no other thought should be given them than how to execute them best and how to understand the intentions of superiors in the most complete manner. Criticism is apt to spoil your pleasure and keenness in your work and besides is useless because in your position it cannot be well founded . . . . . at a later time when history lays bare all events of war the motives which influenced superiors in designing their measures . . . . . may be studied for self improvement and made the subject of independent reflection."

Having determined the mission and clearly fixed it in our minds as the guide of all our efforts we must next investigate the difficulties that will oppose the accomplishment of the mission. This investigation is recorded under the heading "Enemy Forces - Their Strength, Disposition, and Probable Intentions." Under this heading in problem solving it is not necessary to repeat the information given in the problem but rather to state the deductions and inferences from such information. In problem work the information of the enemy given in the problem is usually the information that the problem



maker, regarded as reasonable. It is sometimes the degree of information calculated to develop the motive of the problem. In actual war, information is always incomplete, often inaccurate, sometimes entirely lacking. It has to be sifted, weighed, tested, to establish its reliability.

Information of the enemy is important, but an estimate of his information of us is also important. The initiative is largely a matter of information. If we know and he does not know, that is one thing, if we know and he knows too, that is quite another thing. A Problem Solver must therefore consider all he knows of the enemy and then record all his deductions and inferences concerning the enemy.

The attitude to adopt throughout the solution of the problem is one of determination to find out. The considerations should be arranged so that each one, once determined from a necessary step in a complete survey of the situation. The estimate is not for the purpose of justifying a decision previously arrived at. It is a reasoned solution of a problem where each step in the process approaches a decision, which, without those steps could be arrived at by accident only.

Although the part of the estimate now under discussion deals with the enemy forces it will be found impracticable to omit here all discussion of our own forces.

The effort should be in this part of the estimate, to arrive at the enemy's point of view, to think as he would think of us, to consider all the plans that he would consider, and to estimate which of those plans would be most injurious to us. This is the most difficult part of the estimate. The intentions of the enemy are frequently not divined. Clausewitz said:- "There are always only three cases possible, and when all these have been provided for, the fourth invariably happens." Wellington said:- "The great thing is to know from this side of the hill what the enemy is doing on the other."

It will not be possible in most cases to arrange the appro-



priate reply for all the possible intentions of the enemy. But all courses of the enemy should nevertheless be carefully considered to avoid being taken by surprise. The strategist must always be ready with a remedy for a new situation but he will rarely issue the remedy until the situation arises. One must endeavor never to be caught in a situation that has not been foreseen and considered as a possibility. It is only by a thorough and painstaking consideration of the enemy's possible intentions that surprise can be avoided. Anyone familiar with military history knows the great moral value attached to surprise.

The third step in the estimate deals with our own forces and is recorded under the heading "Our Own Forces, Their Strength, Disposition and Courses Open to Them." Here again it is not necessary to repeat the data of the problem but rather the deductions from the data as applied to our own view point of our own forces. There should be a thorough examination of the courses of action open to us. This examination of courses should not be made as of courses of action in the abstract, but as courses of action related to an active enemy ready to profit by our errors.

Each course of action should be clearly outlined and definitely considered. No course of action should be considered that is not calculated to attain the mission. Having clearly outlined a course of action, examine it. Does it accord with the mission? What is its prospect of success? What will be the penalty of failure? Does it build for the future? Is it what the enemy will expect? Arrangements for the sure attainment of the mission are of first importance, then for an attainment of the mission that will bring the maximum ultimate profit. It is convenient to examine the different courses of action in what may at first appear their order of merit. When all reasonable courses of have been examined and weighed

*reversed*



one of the courses of action is decided upon. This is called the decision.

The decision is the way adopted to attain the mission. It comprehends a definite plan for the immediate future. The decision should not project plan so far into the future as to make a change in orders a probable necessity. Changes in orders are almost invariably injurious. The decision should be such that "Once reached must be unwaveringly carried out with our whole energy." Buddecke says this condition, this unwavering execution of decision, "is of so great importance in tactical affairs that the best course of action, if carried out half heartedly, will come to naught, while a mistake in the choice of course can often be entirely offset by decided and confident action."

The decision must not betray indecision. The decision is the basis of orders to be written to subordinates. Those orders must show resolution. "Resolution is not a heaven-sent gift. It is a quality of mind, the product of keen desire to perform a certain act, and the sure knowledge of how to accomplish it."

Ingelfingen says "Indecision on the part of the Commander-in-Chief may quickly destroy the powers of the troops and render in a short time the whole army unfit for battle. Hence in war it is better to undertake something with firm determination than to vacillate hither and thither, order counter order, disorder. In war we should adhere to what we see to be good enough and not be led astray by seeking for something better."

Dodge says in his life of Napoleon, "Many a general fails by forgetting his first and better intention and in being led astray by an unimportant gain to do what is not in natural strategic sequence. A sense of proportion, of the relative value of things, is one of the highest qualities in the captain as in every other workman."



Captain Eltinge in his Psychology of War says "The leader whose ideas are not clearly defined and whose intention is vacillating will get only half hearted action from his troops, while on the other hand, a determined man who has one clear idea, will himself be surprised to see how the troops respond."

In the solution of problems as in the actual practice of war the need of a ground work of sound military knowledge is constantly experienced. If it happens that a strategic problem is presented there is a demand for knowledge of strategic principles. If it is a tactical problem then tactical knowledge and experience are required in its solution. The problems to be presented in this part of the summer course are principally of the strategic variety. They deal with wide movements and extended areas. It is quite natural, therefore, for the beginner to feel that there should be some guide to his first efforts in the field of strategy. It is a simple matter to collect a long list of strategic maxims and principles but after the list is completed there is always the difficulty of rightly applying these deductions from experience.

Captain Little, who has for many years been on duty here at the War College, is fond of telling us that a principle applies when it applies and it don't apply when it don't apply.

The point he makes is that we cannot apply an abstract strategic or tactical principle in an abstract manner. We must gather in the spirit of all the principles and from that extract an understanding that will be a sure guide in the exercise of judgment.

Lawyers say that nothing is so misleading as a legal maxim; Corbett says "a strategical maxim is in every way less to be trusted in action." Moltke in discussing the solution of a problem explained the application of principles as follows:- "Strategy is not of a kind like the abstract sciences. These have their invariable and precise truths upon which we can build, and from which we can draw further conclusions. We read much in theoret-



ical books about the advantage of operating on interior lines. In spite of that we must still ask ourselves in each case what at the moment is the most advantageous? Strategy is the application of common sense to the conduct of war. The difficulty lies in its execution for in that we dependent on an infinite number of factors. We have to make the best practical use of the means at hand."

In all of this work it is necessary to constantly bear in mind that its value lies not so much in the visible product of our labor as in the training we get while forging the product. The gain to each of us lies not in knowing what the staff solution is but in the training and experience derived from solving the problem. Solutions may not agree with the staff solution and still may be as good or better. If the staff solutions were the product of a master of war, and were, therefore, presumably the best solutions possible, even then knowledge of these solutions would be valuable only after the problem had been solved independently. This knowledge would then enable us to compare the best we each had done with the best that any one could do and to see wherein we were at fault or had fallen short. This comparison would be a part of training, its value would lie in the guide to better effort it would afford.

We have not all the same degree of experience. So that even if we each had acquired or were endowed with the same strategic insight there would still remain a difference in the merit of solutions depending upon the extent of experience on which they were based and the accuracy with which we had judged that experience.

In concluding this paper attention is earnestly called to the possibilities for good that lie in the formal application of the principles of the Estimates of the Situation to the problems that present themselves daily to men of our profession. If each situation presented in ordinary peace time procedure,



were systematically examined to determine the job and the method of doing it and if that method were followed in spite of difficulties we would go far. -- We would make up in efficiency for at least a part of what we fail to obtain in material. We all make effort, every man in the Navy makes effort, but is it the most efficient effort? If we understood the general aim more thoroughly and the relation of our own effort to the general aim more precisely, there would surely be great improvement. It is not necessary to indicate specific instances where great improvement would result from a more formal adherence to this method of reasoning. These will occur to each of us as we become more familiar with the method and its advantages.

The habit of mind induced by practicing the method of the Estimate of the Situation is a scientific habit, one that compels action to flow from reason, one that forbids the acceptance of opinion that is based solely on prestige.

One of the most important principles of the system is that there is always a main task on which the principal effort must be directed. This idea is not in opposition to a suitable distribution of effort but emphasizes the importance of always keeping clearly in mind the main thing. Further, we find it is not enough to have a vague and general conception as a guide to effort, -- There must be a definite and immediate task on the accomplishment of which all the ability and energy available must be concentrated. Our present task is training for war command, -- training to develop to a maximum efficient coordination of effort, unity of action in war.

The following is a brief outline of the method of handling problems.

Each member of the Conference will receive a copy of the problem to be solved. Each member will prepare and hand in at the scheduled time his solution. It is earnestly requested that these solutions be legibly written. The paper to be used



is that in the 8" by 13" ruled pads. Each solution should be bound book fashion with the binders to be found in the Secretary's office. A margin of an inch and a quarter should be left on the left hand edge for binding.

The solutions submitted are carefully examined by a member of the Staff. He prepares a critique of the solutions and presents this together with the Staff solution to the Conference. The problem, individual solutions, and the Staff solution are then open for general discussion. The critique is divided into two parts and the discussion similarly divided. The first part of the critique will be on the Estimate of the Situation and the soundness of the resulting decisions. The second part of the critique will be on the orders, and discussion will be directed towards the interpretation of the order and order form rather than towards the soundness of the measures prescribed by the order.

The solution of the following problem was prepared by Commander Vogelgesang to illustrate the form and method of the Estimate of the Situation.



PROBLEM.

MOTIVE:- Exercise in applying the methods of problem solving.

GENERAL SITUATION: - War was declared between ORANGE and BLUE 18 January 1909. The BLUE Main Fleet left GUANTANAMO on that date for the Pacific via MAGELLAN Strait. The Pacific Detachment under command of Rear Admiral J--- is at SEATTLE. This detachment consists of 6 B, 4 C, 5 V, and 3 colliers.

SPECIAL SITUATION: - On 10 February 1909, at 9 a.m. Rear Admiral J--- receives information that a large ORANGE convoy of transports with escort was sighted at 6 a.m. 8 February in Lat.  $51^{\circ} 30' N.$ , Long.  $160^{\circ} W.$ , steaming eastward, speed about ten knots.

REQUIRED:- Rear Admiral J's Estimate of the Situation.

ASSUMPTIONS GOVERNING in the Solution:-

(1) The Pacific Detachments is organized as follows:-

Division Ten

Rear Admiral J--  
B-1, B-2, B-3.

Division Eleven

Rear Admiral H--  
B-4, B-5, B-6.

Division Thirteen

Captain W--  
C-1, C-2, C-3, C-4.

Destroyer Division Seven

Commander F--  
V-1, V-2, V-3, V-4, V-5.

(2) Rear Admiral J-- commands.



ESTIMATE OF THE SITUATION.

MISSION: - To prevent this enemy force from landing on our Coast.

ENEMY FORCES: - Their Strength, Disposition, and Probable Intentions.

Information regarding the strength and disposition of the enemy forces is very indefinite. All that is known is that there is a large convoy of transports with an escort steaming towards our West Coast. The escort would likely be a formidable one, for such a movement on the part of the enemy would indicate that he was directing his maximum effort towards invasion; and the protection necessary for the transport of a large body of troops would entail the employment of a naval force very considerably superior to any force that we might at present be able to send against it.

The necessity of guarding the convoy, however, entails a tactical weakness which might be taken advantage of,

Judging from the position in which this force was sighted and its course, it seems most probable that it is proceeding on a great circle course from the enemy home country to the Puget Sound region. The enemy, therefore, probably intends to occupy that region as the first step in his invasion.

This force will probably be proceeding with a strong screen well advanced from his train and from the main body to the Escort. At night he will probably adopt a close screening formation around his train.

OUR OWN FORCES: - Their Strength, Disposition and the Courses of Action Open to Us.

Our own force consists of 6 B, 4 C, 5 V, and 3 colliers. This force, though small, represents all that we have in this theatre of war.

There is nothing else with which to oppose the evident pur-



pose of the enemy, and the situation demands immediate and well directed activities.

The Courses of Action Open to Us are:-

1. To remain within the waters of the Puget Sound region; to deliver an attack upon the Convoy in those waters in case that be the enemy objective.
2. To proceed to gain contact with the enemy forces to determine their strength and dispositions with a view to attacking the convoy before it arrives on our Coast.

Inasmuch as the strength of the enemy escort is not known, and since it may be much stronger than the forces in this command, it would be extremely hazardous to await his entrance into the Straits of San Juan de Fuca before preparing an attack.

The enemy will realize that he will be opposed by whatever force we may have; and if he reach the Straits unmolested he will be in a position to guard the entrance, after his Convoy shall have passed, against any force that may try to enter; and he will be able to push ahead a strong reconnoitering force to uncover the position of any naval force of ours that may be inside the Straits or the Sound. He would then be able either to defeat or contain that force and it could no longer menace his Convoy.

Our naval force inside the Straits could for a time be under the protection of the series of Puget Sound fortifications; but they could be contained behind those fortifications, and the work of landing the enemy troops could be carried on with security.

Employed in this way our naval force would come in the category of what Admiral Mahan has called a "fortress fleet"; and which he designates as a faulty and vicious employment of an active naval force.

The fortifications would most likely fall because they could be taken in reverse; and when that time comes, this force, employed behind those defenses, will be lost, without accomplishing its mission or seriously menacing the progress of the enemy's campaign.



The first Course mentioned must therefore be rejected. The Second Course mentioned conserves the mobility of this force; and tends to clear up the situation by providing us with information relative to the strength and disposition of the enemy's escort, which is an absolute necessity in order that proper dispositions can be made with a view to harassing and attacking the Convoy.

Bad weather conditions, likely to be met with at this season of the year in the Northern Pacific Ocean, may cause a considerable elongation of the enemy's formation beyond his power to successfully protect; it may even cause a scattering of his force. These conditions should be favorable to our purpose and they are possible advantages that we should be in a position to grasp.

DECISION:-

- (1) To proceed to sea with my entire force with a view to attacking the Enemy Convoy.

Minor Decisions.

- (2) To proceed at noon.
- (3) To follow great circle course from Tatoosh towards point where enemy was sighted.
- (4) To form a scouting line of 4 C 50 miles in advance of Main Body with 25 miles between vessels.
- (5) To keep armored cruisers and destroyers together.
- (6) To send colliers to rendezvous 60 miles S.W. of Cape Disappointment.
- (7) To appoint a rendezvous for combatant vessels 20 miles West Mag. of Tatoosh Id.
- (8) To use Cipher B for wireless.
- (9) To remain in B-1 with main body.