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OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP ONCE BEYOND THE CULMINATING POINT: PERSPECTIVES ON CALCULATED TACTICAL RISK TO ACHIEVE OPERATIONAL SUCCESS

by

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract of

OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP ONCE BEYOND THE CULMINATING POINT: PERSPECTIVES ON CALCULATED TACTICAL RISK TO ACHIEVE OPERATIONAL SUCCESS

There is an extraordinary degree of risk of casualties and destruction to the attacking force associated with continuing the attack beyond the tactical culminating point. The operational commander may take a significant calculated risk at the tactical level and pass the culminating point, or accept loss once beyond the culminating point, in order to achieve success at the operational level. The forces of Confederate General "Stonewall" Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley in the Civil War and U.S. Marine Corps Major General Alexander Vandegrift in the Guadalcanal Operation in the Second World War passed beyond the culminating point.

An analysis of the leadership of these two generals produces insight into some major characteristics of operational leadership once beyond the culminating point in light of the great tactical risk. The framework for analysis includes a physical component, and the components of will, initiative, coup d'oeil, and style of communication. Operational commanders demonstrate the ability to limit their tactical objectives beyond the culminating point and seek to capitalize on temporary risk to achieve success at a higher level. Other insights relate to the significant role of strength of will and intuitive decision-making and vision. These insights are relevant to the challenges that senior commanders potentially face in present warfare as well as to further research and analysis in doctrine, theory, and the operational art.

INTRODUCTION

> *Since the object of the attack is the possession of the enemy's territory, it follows that the advance will continue until the attacker's superiority is exhausted; it is this that drives the offensive on toward its goal and can easily drive it further.*[1]

As reflected in his statement, Carl von Clausewitz's concept of the culminating point of the attack is grounded in opposing sides seeking victory over one another, much like war itself.[2] The culminating point of the attack is the point in time and space when the combat power of the attacker ceases to be greater than that of the defender, and when continuing the attack beyond it poses great peril.[3] Moreover, advancing beyond the culminating point of the attack deliberately or unintentionally means to risk counterattack and defeat, because the balance between attacker and defender is weighted in favor of the defender.[4] Reasons for culmination on the offensive include depleted, exhausted or less morally committed forces, overextended lines of communication and exhausted supplies.

While the attacker can avoid or delay going past the culminating point, the defender can hasten the attacker's culminating point and is in control when the attacker is beyond the culminating point. However, analysis of forces beyond the culminating point in three Second World War operations shows that the attackers hastened their own culminating point more than did the defenders because of such things as overconfidence or a bold, miscalculated gamble.[5] [a]

A legitimate and substantiatable justification for passing the culminating point includes:

> *Justifiable losses at lower levels of command for the sake of success at higher levels, tactical bunts as it were. Calculated risks at the tactical level will occasionally meet defeat, but, collectively, can increase the overall efficiency of*

[a] The operations analyzed were the German defeat [Rommel] at El Alamein, 1942; the Soviet defeat [Vatutin] at Kharkov, 1943; and the German defeat [Hitler] at the Battle of the Bulge, 1944.

operations. The sacrifice of a forward unit can enable the main (but otherwise outnumbered) force to inflict decisive damage.[6]

Risk is assumed to be part of every military action. An enormous risk of high casualties and defeat of the attacking force is associated with continuing the attack beyond the culminating point. A calculated high degree of tactical risk once beyond the culminating point, i.e., the commander has considered the great degree of risk, may be acceptable to the operational commander if he believes his force can overwhelm the enemy and might achieve success at the tactical, operational or strategic level or more than one level. However, at some point his forces may incur needless losses and be tactically, operationally or strategically defeated. Clausewitz held that attacking beyond the culminating point was useless and damaging unless the enemy yields. The operational commander may risk every bit of his force's physical and moral superiority to gain in the end, however, beyond the culminating point the risk will result usually in disproportionate and adverse effects from the enemy's response.[7] [b] Clausewitz contends:

> *This is why the great majority of generals will prefer to stop well short of their objective rather than risk approaching it too closely, and why those with high courage and an enterprising spirit will often overshoot it and so fail to attain their purpose. Only the man who can achieve great results with limited means has really hit the mark.*[8]

What generates further analysis is the potential of gaining insight into some of the major qualities of operational commanders' leadership when they assume significant tactical risk

[b] The difference between the culminating point of the attack and the culminating point of victory may "be a matter of scale. . . . The culminating point of attack addresses the contest of strength - physical and moral - between and attacker and defender. . . . The culminating point of victory addresses a conflict between states and introduces the idea of military aims. . . . The underlying concept of culmination . . . is [a] fundamental concept that has the greatest utility at any level of war." Hammond, "Does the Culminating Point Exist at the Tactical Level," p. 5.

in attacking under the most difficult of circumstances, i.e., beyond the culminating point, in order to capitalize operationally.

This paper examines two cases where forces had gone beyond the culminating point and analyzes some major characteristics of the operational commander's leadership when the commanders calculated an extremely high degree of tactical risk or accepted loss for the sake of achieving operational success. It analyzes the leadership of Confederate General "Stonewall" Jackson in a key battle in the Shenandoah Valley during the Civil War, whose forces sustained a tactical mauling but achieved a brilliant operational success; and it analyzes the leadership of U.S. Marine Corps Major General Alexander Vandegrift in the Guadalcanal Operation during the Second World War, when for months U.S. marines were beyond the culminating point. In both cases, these senior commanders calculated great tactical risk and assumed loss once beyond the tactical culminating point, and achieved operational or strategic success. This analysis of operational leadership is relevant to gaining deeper insights into the challenges that senior commanders potentially face in the most perilous circumstances in present warfare and serves also as a useful contribution to research on the nexus of theory, operational art, and doctrinal application.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Clausewitz holds that there are three indicators of victory after an engagement shown in the defeated side: physical loss, loss of morale (will), and giving up its intentions (initiative).[9] When these indicators are considered together, they may also be used by either side to endorse or signal approaching or passing the culminating point.[10] However, operational commanders may not know that they have passed the culminating point until

they are beyond it. Moreover, "the culminating point is very difficult to see, and one might never identify it at the exact point of decision. . . . That does not absolve commanders and staffs from planning for it, . . . finding ways to identify it and capitalizing on it."[11]

These three indicators or components serve as the main part of the framework for analysis of the leadership of operational commanders once beyond the tactical culminating point, because the components endorse the culminating point. There are two additional major components of operational leadership that will complement and complete the analytical framework, which are Clausewitz's notion of coup d'oeil and the commander's style of communication with his subordinate commanders and staff. These five components serve as the overarching framework from which the analysis of operational leadership when commanders calculate a high degree of tactical risk to achieve higher success will proceed. The objective is to analyze some of the major characteristics of the leadership of the two generals that relate to each of the five components in order to describe operational leadership characteristics that are significant in the crucible of combat beyond the culminating point.

ANALYSIS OF OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP ONCE BEYOND THE CULMINATING POINT

Physical Component

Operational commanders have indicators of physical loss that their units are beyond the culminating point, such as inadequate relative combat power, destruction of friendly centers of gravity or operational reserves, high relative loss rates, or the inability

to logistically sustain or synchronize. In deteriorated conditions, generals calculate significant tactical risk or accept loss in view of potential operational success to be gained. Field Marshal von Manstein infers that in such situations a commander's leadership is key:

> *It [is] the hour that must show whether the will of the attacker to exert himself to the very limit of physical endurance is stronger than that of the defender to go on resisting. The struggle of deciding whether to call for a last supreme effort, at the risk of having ultimately demanded all that sacrifice in vain, is one that can only be fought out in the heart of the commander concerned.*[12]

In the Shenandoah Valley Campaign of March to June 1862, General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson was given the mission of keeping pressure on Union forces around Washington in order to keep them separated and confused and to prevent their concentration for an attack against Richmond.[13] Jackson commanded the Army of the Valley consisting of four brigades. In the 23 March 1862 Battle of Kernstown, Jackson's forces passed beyond the tactical culminating point of the attack, assuming losses for the sake of operational and strategic gain. As Union General Banks' forces prepared to leave Winchester, Virginia to move east, Jackson sent forces under Brigadier General Garnett to engage them. Jackson believed that Banks' forces, under Brigadier General Shields, had only four regiments, however, Jackson's cavalry commander's intelligence report underestimated enemy strength. Shields had over 9,000 soldiers to Jackson's 3,600. Prior to the start of the battle, Jackson's soldiers were exhausted and footsore from marching, conditions that were typical following Jackson's marches in the Valley Campaign. However, after a hasty reconnaissance, Jackson believed that the timing was most opportune and ordered Garnett to attack.

Jackson recognized after contact that he was fighting a much larger force than reported but accepted the risk. Outnumbered, short of ammunition, in danger of being outflanked, and overwhelmed by a relentless volume of enemy musket and cannon fire, the Confederate fighters became desperate and exhausted after hours of intense fighting. Banks later claimed that Jackson's forces were not able to either attack or resist.[14] They were beyond the tactical culminating point. Garnett committed his troops to a disorganized withdrawal as his lines were collapsing, though the Confederates continued fighting and firing as they retreated over a mile.[15] Jackson attempted to stem the withdrawal, and ordered his reserve brigades forward, but the rearward move turned into a rout.[16] By nightfall, Jackson's forces had suffered tactical defeat.[c]

However, Jackson's great tactical risk produced operational and strategic success. Union senior commanders believed that only a large force attempting to move toward Washington would attack Shield's division as it did. As a result, the operational success was that Banks was ordered to return to the Valley, thereby diverting thousands of Union troops from reinforcing McClellan's army.[17] Jackson based this calculated risk on an assessment that his forces had few prescribed material limitations, and could perform to the limits of their physical capabilities, often to the point of exhaustion. In light of this assessment, and recognizing the disparity between intelligence reports and local Union strength, Jackson accepted tactical losses beyond the culminating point in order to achieve operational success.

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[c] Confederate casualties: 455, plus 263 missing; Union losses: 568. Robertson, "Stonewall in the Shenandoah," p. 100.

In the World War II Guadalcanal Operation commencing 7 August 1942, Major General Vandegrift's reinforced 1st Marine Division was given the mission to seize Tulagi and positions adjacent to it from Japanese control as a springboard for further operations across the western South Pacific.[18 d] Vandegrift chose to seize the Guadalcanal airfield.[19] Between August and December, employing upwards of 23,000 men from three regiments and three additional battalions, Vandegrift's marines were beyond the tactical culminating point, whereby he accepted extremely high tactical risk in order to gain success at the operational and strategic level. At the outset, they had insufficient time to train and prepare for the amphibious landing on Guadalcanal, as the invasion was brought forward hastily and at considerable risk. In attempting to expand the perimeter around Henderson airfield, Vandegrift's forces encountered numerically superior and stubborn Japanese resistance, often resistance to the last man. In August, the aircraft carriers providing essential air cover to the marines were withdrawn, badly exposing the marines to heavy Japanese air, naval and artillery fires and concentrated ground attacks.[20]

The isolated marines were short of rations, water, fuel, ammunition and supplies, while the Japanese brought in reinforcements of men and supplies because supporting U.S. naval and air strength was not sufficient to stop them.[21] The Marines' often desperate tactical struggle over the next several months was marked by fierce combat (some hand-to-hand) in hostile terrain, critical manpower and logistical shortages, and tropical diseases, resulting in troops that were gaunt and exhausted.[22] Despite the tremendous tactical risks and resultant losses that Vandegrift endured over this period, the Japanese suffered greater ground and air attrition than the U.S., causing a turning point that started

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[d] Operation WATCHTOWER.

the irreversible decline in Japanese military power, and marking the Guadalcanal invasion as an operational and strategic success.[23] [e]

Will Component

The indicator of an onset of loss of morale (will) is a unit's pressure toward disorganization characterized by degraded command and control systems. Loss of morale is ultimately manifested in force disintegration wherein units start to collapse and individuals lose their will to fight.[24] Operational commanders who continue the attack beyond the culminating point for the sake of operational success would by necessity have to observe the battle critically for an assessment of the tactical loss associated with disintegration on account of the defender's rising advantage. Before and after the culminating point, the commander's will is a pivotal factor in preserving a force's fighting spirit. A general's refusal to accept defeat, when not carried too far, along with resolve and fortitude are also crucial elements in the decision to assume enormous tactical risk in order to capitalize operationally.[25]

Shenandoah Valley. Stonewall Jackson committed his tired and sore foot cavalry forward into battle at Kernstown accepting the extremely large risk of casualties and losses with the aim of killing as many of the enemy as possible and ultimately diverting Union forces from the Peninsula. He was the quintessential practitioner of the tactical offensive, who selflessly, audaciously and mercilessly drove his soldiers, displaying utter contempt for stragglers. During the Valley Campaign, the energetic general retained tremendous control of his men and got them to do more than they normally could.[26]

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[e] Estimated Aug-Dec Japanese land force losses on Guadalcanal: 20,800. U.S. Marine ground losses: 1,207. Kent, p. 9; Zimmerman, p. 169.

Jackson wanted to force the Union to do his will by moving swiftly and attacking decisively. At the outset of this battle he rose to the challenge to vigorously attack.[27]

Jackson initiated the attack at mid-afternoon on a Sunday before the Union forces had the opportunity to reinforce or escape, despite his strong religious convictions about observing the Sabbath. After continuing the attack beyond the culminating point, his forces disintegrated and his soldiers lost their will to fight. During the collapse of lines, with soldiers beaten and the sun nearly down, Jackson exploded with anger, directed a drummer to beat the rally, and urged soldiers to fix bayonets and hold, but the tide of Confederates withdrawing could not be stayed.[28 f] Jackson demonstrated iron strength of will and fearlessness amid combat beyond the culminating point, although his actions fell short of temerity because he initiated the attack at an opportunity that was based on calculated risk not an all or nothing gamble. The Valley Campaign was in his home territory which explains in part his great fortitude and motivation to accept significant risk in protection of the homeland. Moreover, he displayed absolute confidence in himself and coolness under fire as he promptly and willingly assumed great tactical risk for the sake of success at a higher level.

Guadalcanal. In the Guadalcanal operation, Vandegrift's actions were backed by his tremendous strength of will and moral courage. Upon learning of the departure of the carriers and air cover following the disastrous outcome of the Battle of Savo Island on 9 August, he refused to accept defeat and demonstrated resolve that Guadalcanal would be

[f] Days after the withdrawal, Jackson relieved Garnett for his decision to quit the field without orders (and for Garnett's other previously alleged incompetence). Eyewitnesses to the battle support Garnett's decision, claiming that it was the only realistic course of action. The relief had a decisive effect on discipline and obedience of Jackson's subordinates in subsequent battles.

no repeat of the Bataan or Wake Island debacles. Moreover, in light of the neglect by Admiral Turner of the marines' need for reinforcements and supplies, Vandegrift stated his determination and commitment that the Marines would stay on Guadalcanal "come hell or high water."[29] He aggressively employed construction personnel and equipment to complete the airfield as expeditiously as possible. In the face of the Japanese numerical advantage during frequent ground attacks, Vandegrift held and imbued in his marines that only resolute, confident and disciplined marines could achieve tactical and operational success.[30]

Initiative Component

Commanders receive indicators that their forces might be beyond the culminating point particularly through units giving up their intentions, i.e., forsaking freedom of action and losing initiative. Lost initiative is recognizable across physical and moral dimensions as well.[31] Therefore, operational commanders might know their forces have lost the initiative vis-a-vis the enemy in conjunction with physical and moral disintegration. However, loss of freedom of action may be short-lived. Clausewitz states:

> *The offensive thrust or action is complete in itself. It does not have to be complemented by defense; but dominating considerations of time and space do introduce defense as a necessary evil. . . . The act of attack, particularly in strategy, is thus a constant alternation and combination of attack and defense.*[32]

Freedom of action can be regained because "winning or losing at the operational level is temporary; it has 'interim culminating points' as the campaign ebbs and flows, but there likely will be no single, irreversible culminating point - until . . . the war goals are met or lost for good."[33] Thus, operational commanders might justify immense tactical risk or assume loss for operational gain because of the perceived transitory nature of passing

beyond the culminating point, whereafter the initiative will be regained. Of critical importance for operational success, generals "must anticipate strain and stress on their forces; they must look beyond the current battle and anticipate the maintenance of the initiative. They must out-think the enemy . . . ."[34]

Shenandoah Valley. Jackson intended to attack while the opportunity presented itself, before expected Union reinforcement or escape during the night. The opportunity was temporary, and he perceived risk to be temporary as well. Jackson viewed risk as sacrificing temporary tactical certainty for greater success at the operational level. He used surprise and deception by risking a small force with greatly exerted effort to deceive Shields' forces into believing they were up against a larger force, and by pursuing the attack as long as possible.[35] Jackson instinctively reacted to create order among chaos by trying to salvage a holding of the lines and urging soldiers to fix bayonets and sweep the field with them, but he could do little to reverse the plight of the Confederate forces especially in light of Garnett's order to withdraw.

Once whipped in brutal combat, his Confederate soldiers gave up fighting, and sacrificed the initiative and all freedom of action. This loss of unit initiative taken along with their physical exhaustion, shortage of ammunition, and loss of individual will to fight indicated that they exceeded the point of culmination. Were it not for the strict discipline, extensive training, blind obedience, cohesion and loyalty that Jackson earlier instilled in and demanded from his forces, they may not have continued to attack beyond the culminating point for the hours that they did. Jackson motivated many soldiers and officers merely by their perceived threat of punishment. He imbued in them that they were

individually fighting for victory or their own death, and were to follow a 'take no prisoners' philosophy.[36] Moreover, they believed the risks Jackson took would in the end be proven as correct decisions on their behalf.

Guadalcanal. When Admiral Halsey presented Vandegrift with the likelihood that further reinforcements would be diverted from Guadalcanal for other South Pacific operations, Vandegrift cited the marines' dismal physical state and morale, and pressed for renewed freedom of action, insisting that he receive the Americal Division and another regiment from the 2nd Marine Division.[37] Halsey affirmed Vandegrift's needs and the high priority of Guadalcanal.[38] At an opportunity in late August 1942 to destroy a Japanese naval convoy carrying reinforcements, Vandegrift took a sizable risk to seize the initiative by launching his entire small fleet of airplanes, only to have threatening weather turn the planes back. Additionally, Vandegrift pushed for sea control in the vicinity of Guadalcanal to gain back lost freedom of action. In a ground battle when one of his battalion commanders did not pursue the Japanese aggressively, Vandegrift refused to further sacrifice the initiative and ordered the regimental commander to take action, resulting in the battalion commander's immediate relief and replacement. Moreover, Vandegrift forced efforts to regain the initiative by habitually inspecting the preparedness of the marines and their equipment and the readiness of their positions to withstand Japanese ground, air or artillery attacks.[39]

After recognizing in mid-August that his marines were in for a protracted fight with inadequate forces and support, Vandegrift limited his objective to protection of the airfield with an improvised series of perimeter defensive positions, a transitory means of

surviving beyond the culminating point amid the broader operational offensive.[40] The acute struggle and desperation prohibited Vandegrift from moving ahead to capture Guadalcanal Island. It was in the fight to establish and retain the perimeter, and efforts to expand holdings beyond enemy artillery range of the airfield, that Vandegrift calculated and assumed an exceptionally high degree of risk to his marines beyond the culminating point. Vandegrift risked the loss of marines because he knew that the struggle beyond the culminating point was temporary and that operational success from regaining the initiative and securing Guadalcanal could be achieved.

Coup d'Oeil

Operational leadership once beyond the culminating point when commanders seek gain at the operational level can be explained by Clausewitz's concept of coup d'oeil. The one significant element that greatly influences combat power is the commander's military genius. His vision and intuitive decision-making in war may determine whether the force attains ultimate success or failure.[41] Moreover, "only when resources are combined with such intangible factors as leadership, training, and motivation can potential, i.e., raw numbers, be brought to bear against an enemy and transformed into power."[42] A commander may go beyond the culminating point and achieve success but must realize that he is continuing in the face of great risk. This willingness to take risk may be the mark of a great commander if he achieves higher level success, or of a very unfortunate commander if he is not successful at any level of war, i.e., tactical, operational or strategic.

Shenandoah Valley. Jackson's military genius was displayed through his intuitive decision-making, especially under stress when remarkable physical and mental courage

were also in demand. He demonstrated the ability to concentrate soldiers at the right place and time, i.e., capitalize on the principle of mass, while risking tactical defeat once beyond the culminating point. This resulted in altering the course of Union operations and strategy. Despite inaccurate intelligence about enemy strength, Jackson's tactical intuition about the military use of terrain in the Valley, employment of infantry, artillery and cavalry, and about the nature of his Confederate soldiers proved that a substantial calculated risk of attacking beyond the tactical culminating point could yield success at the higher level.[43] Furthermore, he demonstrated vision and keenness of judgment in the face of overwhelming tactical odds to decisively pursue and win success at the operational level.

Guadalcanal. Once the carriers and air protection departed the Guadalcanal area leaving the marines isolated and dispersed around the unfinished Japanese airfield, Vandegrift intuitively determined that a Japanese amphibious assault onto the beaches at Lunga Point closest to the airfield would be the most threatening move they could make, and he adjusted the perimeter to thwart any such attempt at the water's edge. Moreover, without higher guidance, he ordered the completion of the airfield, believing it to be key to the success of his operation. Once aircraft were actively using the completed Henderson airfield, the flights deterred the Japanese from ground attacks or amphibious landings across the beaches at Lunga Point, showing the acuteness of Vandegrift's intuitive judgment on the significance of the airfield.[44] Vandegrift capitalized on the Japanese peacemeal tactical operations to the marines' advantage, consistently out-thinking the enemy while maintaining focus on his vision. His demonstrated intuition about Japanese

operational characteristics and the terrain enabled him to capitalize on conditions that would ordinarily result in great tactical loss. Moreover, he reduced the marines' loss beyond the culminating point by employing unconventional methods of structuring the perimeter, placing reserves, and reacting to enemy surprise attacks.

Communication Style

A senior commander's style of communication with his subordinate commanders and staff is another crucial dimension of operational leadership when the commander calculates an extremely high degree of tactical risk or accepts loss for the sake of operational gain. Notwithstanding the assumption that the commander is in the best position to calculate risk,[45] "intuition . . . must be strengthened by thorough work of qualified staffs, good intelligence, and correct evaluation of a large amount of information."[46] Staffs and subordinate commanders' requests must be considered by the operational commander, and conversely, staffs and subordinates must intimately know the mission and the general's intentions and proneness to risk.

Shenandoah Valley. Jackson's style of communication with subordinate commanders and staff helps explain both the ultimate success of his huge tactical risk and his tactical defeat once past the point of culmination. He communicated through his actions and talent what his expectations of discipline, courage and competence were, and that he would place himself at the same risk as his subordinates. Moreover, Jackson positioned himself at the critical place on the battlefield for combat decision-making and directing. With high expectations and personal sacrifice and courage to endure similar risks, Jackson could morally accept potential risk and minimize risk to subordinates. Also

this was his way of insuring key subordinates learned the mission and his capacity for risk. His soldiers were willing to endure great tactical risk, even beyond the culminating point, because they revered the general and his talent, and trusted that he would select the proper course of action. As a result, Jackson was able to extract so much from his soldiers and would usually achieve tactical success. However, in this battle Jackson's forces tenaciously attacked beyond the culminating point for hours until lines collapsed, ultimately trading tactical defeat for operational success.

On the other hand, Jackson's secrecy was problematic. It detracted from potential tactical success or regaining the initiative once his forces were collapsing. While his secrecy about his operations prevented intelligence leaks to the enemy about the disposition of his forces and his intent, it kept subordinate commanders and staff wondering about what his plans were, when operations were planned, and why. Jackson's mode of operation was to inform subordinate commanders and staff only of their duties and movements prior to battle, and once in battle depended on continual communication with his subordinates and often ignored the chain of command.[47] Garnett's lack of information about Jackson's plans or intent explains in part why Confederate forces came out on the unsuccessful side of Jackson's tactical risk calculus. Jackson possessed enormous tactical competence; however, his secrecy veiled Garnett's knowledge of his intent and stifled the potential tactical judgment Garnett could have used to possibly create a more favorable tactical outcome before culmination. Once Confederate forces were disintegrating and confusion reigned beyond the tactical culminating point, Jackson's mode of communication had proven vulnerable and ineffective in gaining tactical success.

Guadalcanal. In September 1942, Vandegrift communicated through his actions his expected standards of officer competence, aggressive spirit and conduct by replacing both inadequately performing and older, less aggressive officers with those who met his expectations. Also indicative of his willingness to hold the line on his standards, that month Vandegrift ordered the division command post moved to a less vulnerable location over the outspoken and profane objections of his staff.[48] In spite of his marines' perilous circumstances, significant tactical risks, uncertainties about the enemy and logistics relief, Vandegrift consistently communicated risks to his subordinates with confidence, optimism and steady assurance while deliberately and tenaciously leading them toward operational success.

CONCLUSIONS

Both General Stonewall Jackson and General Alexander Vandegrift calculated great tactical risks and assumed loss beyond the culminating point in order to achieve operational or strategic success. Based on the analysis of their operational leadership beyond the culminating point, there are several major conclusions that can be drawn about tremendous tactical risk-taking for operational gain. These conclusions are relevant to senior commanders today, who in current combat situations potentially face passing the culminating point, involving calculating enormous risk or accepting loss for gain at a higher level.

Jackson's underestimation of enemy strength and hasty reconnaissance before battle, and Vandegrift's hasty preparation for the amphibious landing, shows the importance to the operational commander of accurate and processed intelligence, and a

thorough battlefield reconnaissance that produces situational awareness in order to assess, calculate and reduce risk. Their intimate knowledge of their forces' capabilities was an asset, demonstrating the extent to which the operational commander can capitalize on a thorough knowledge of force capabilities to achieve success. However, Jackson's belief that his forces had few limitations could have been a grave liability, showing that such a belief can waste forces without guaranteeing success at any level.

Stonewall and Vandegrift's selfless and ebullient driving of their troops to get them to do more than they normally could under the extreme demands beyond the culminating point shows the importance of will to the operational commander. As these generals demonstrated, operational commanders who rise to the challenge and maintain iron strength of will, absolute resolve, confidence and fortitude in the face of immense tactical risk can often produce success at a higher level. The fact that both senior commanders emphasized leader and troop readiness and discipline, indicates the crucial role these factors play in minimizing tactical loss amid the perils beyond the culminating point.

Jackson and Vandegrift's limiting their objectives and accepting huge tactical risk involved in seizing an opportunity to attack, shows the operational commander's ability to capitalize on temporary risk beyond the culminating point in order to regain initiative and freedom of action for higher level gain. Jackson's use of surprise and deception with a relatively small force demonstrates the positive impact that risk combined with deception could have on the operational or strategic outcome. Additionally, both generals relieved and replaced key subordinates who failed to meet standards or preserve the force's initiative, showing the key role operational commanders have as standard bearers and

disciplinarians even in the toughest of circumstances beyond the culminating point. Furthermore, they created order out of chaos once beyond the culminating point, reflecting the significance of the operational commanders' thorough tactical competence and ability to improvise as the situation dictates in order to regain the initiative.

Jackson and Vandegrifts' unit cohesion and loyalty in the face of tactical risks display the crucial importance to the operational commander of building these positive force multipliers in order for forces to better withstand the perils of combat. Both senior commanders possessed intuitive tactical judgment and the essence of military genius reflective of Clausewitz's notion of coup d'oeil, which demonstrated one of the operational commanders' most valuable attributes in calculating sizable tactical risk and minimizing losses beyond the culminating point. Finally, Vandegrift's capacity to effectively communicate to ensure his intent was understood by key subordinates serves as another dimension crucial to the operational commander's ability to reduce tactical loss once beyond the culminating point in an effort to achieve operational success.

In future combat, where tactical risk is dangerously high once beyond the culminating point of the attack, operational commanders might accept temporary risk as they seek to regain the initiative. They will depend upon situational awareness of the tactical battle by being present at the tactical level to make key decisions, as Jackson and Vandegrift did, or by relying on real-time information. And they must possess the strength of will, ability to make intuitive critical judgments, and the capacity to effectively communicate under significant duress to key subordinates. The ultimate prize of the commander's great risk may be to achieve success at a higher level.

ENDNOTES

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